

THE EXPERIENCE OF LITERATURE

DRAMA

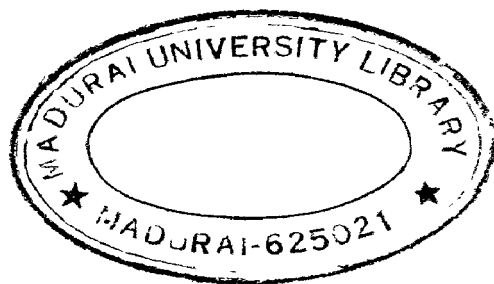
THE EXPERIENCE OF LITERATURE

A READER WITH COMMENTARIES

LIONEL TRILLING

Columbia University

Drama



HOLT, RINEHART AND WINSTON

New York Chicago San Francisco Toronto

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PREFACE

This is an anthology designed to be used in college courses that undertake the study of literature in general, often with a view to "introducing" the student to an art that he perhaps thinks of as remote from his interest. Such courses have had an established place in the curriculum for a considerable time, and for almost as long their convenience has been served by books that bring together notable examples of the chief literary genres, usually, like this one, drama, fiction, and poetry. In its purpose, then, and in most of its elements, the present volume is of a familiar kind. What will not be familiar from similar anthologies is the commentaries, in the form of brief essays, that follow each of the plays and stories and certain of the poems. They have only one end in view—to make it more likely that the student's act of reading will be an experience, having in mind what that word implies of an activity of consciousness and response. Their intention, that is to say, is no other than that of every teacher of literature as he works with his students in the classroom.

That there are classrooms in which literature is the subject of instruction testifies to our recognition that the reading of literature is not always and necessarily an experience. As every teacher of literature knows, a student can proceed with diligence from the beginning of a work to its end and yet give but little response to what he reads. We count on what takes place in the classroom to initiate a more appropriate degree of activity. By means of the discussion he institutes, the teacher brings his students to understand that the work before them is an object that may be freely touched and handled, picked up, turned over, looked at from this angle or that, and, at least in some sense, possessed. The commentaries in this book have been supplied in the belief that something has been gained for the classroom situation if the student has previously been led to think about what he will be asked to talk about.

It will readily be seen that no special theory of literature or method of criticism informs what I have written. In some of the commentaries the emphasis falls on formal matters, such as imagery, diction, versification, tone, point of view, and so on. But I have not thought it necessary to limit myself to such

considerations as being more truly, or more purely, literary than others. I have felt free to enter into the overt or implicit meanings of a work and to pursue (sometimes to question) its moral, or social, or religious ideas. I have not hesitated to refer to critical theories or canons of taste of the past. If a biographical or historical circumstance seems to be to the point, I have adduced it. In short, I have availed myself of any of the usual elements of literary discourse that I thought relevant to the work and useful to the student.

I can scarcely fail to be aware of the opinion of some teachers that students should not read anything *about* a work of literature. It is held that coherent discourse in print interferes with the student's perception and feeling, making his response to the work less immediate and sincere, less his own. This is a view that must be taken seriously, especially at the present time, when it may sometimes seem that literature exists chiefly to provide occasions for its being explicated, expounded, and judged, and that, as a consequence of so much public to-do, the individual reader's experience of literature has an ever-diminishing chance of being private and autonomous.

Yet a jealous concern for the privacy and autonomy of the experience of literature must not obscure the truth that the literary experience is, of its very nature, communal—it asks to be shared in discourse. It is certainly possible for literary discourse to become excessive and intrusive, yet in any developed culture the impulse to say things about literature and to take account of what others say about it is no less natural than the creation and the enjoyment of the art. We find a pleasure that seems instinctual not only in the emotions that are aroused by what we read in private but also in communicating them to each other, in trying to understand why we feel as we do, in testing our emotions by those that others tell us they have, in discovering what we might possibly feel beyond what we do feel. And discourse leads to dialectic: we disagree with others in observation and response and in the general principles that we and they have insensibly been led to form. This activity, in itself interesting and pleasant, has the effect of increasing the interest and the pleasure of the private experience. The belief that this is so makes the ground upon which all instruction in literature proceeds. There is, indeed, no other ground. The activity of discourse and dialectic takes various forms and among them there is really no difference in the way they relate to the individual's privacy and autonomy. The discourse of an essay and the dialectic it initiates between itself and the reader are not different in kind from the discourse and the dialectic that go on in the free but directed discussion of the classroom. Neither the discussion nor the essay can be supposed to violate the student's privacy or limit his autonomy—unless on this score the whole process of education is to be impugned!

Nothing could be further from the intention of the commentaries than to usurp or circumscribe the teacher's function. They could hardly say all that is to be said about the works to which they address themselves, and they have tried to say no more than will bring the student into a more intimate and more active connection with what he has read. They obviously do not seek to impose themselves as anything like doctrine and they will not have failed of their purpose if they arouse either the student or the teacher, or both together, to disagreement.

The serviceability of a teaching anthology of this kind is judged by criteria that are obvious enough. Its selection of examples of the various genres should be sufficiently large to permit catholicity and variety. The critical standards by

which it makes its choice should be uncompromising, yet applied with the awareness that, among the innumerable works that command our admiration, some are more accessible to students *than others* and some are more teachable than others. It should assume that literature is a continuous enterprise and include on an equal footing both the traditional and the new. I have had these considerations in mind and a few others as well. In making choice of the works to be included I have preferred those that I thought would prove memorable to the student by reason of momentousness of theme and force of dramatic or intellectual energy. That a work had already proved memorable to many was a special recommendation: not all the works I have chosen are "great" but I have, I think, made preponderant those to which the adjective may be applied.

The plays and stories have been drawn from several literatures. The poems, for obvious reasons, are all English and American. Although the selection of poems for further reading is large, it does not pretend to be canonical, and this is especially to be said of the selection of contemporary poets. It is perhaps here that I should remark that I have thought it best that the poets of our own time who are included in this section of the anthology should be read without footnotes.

The examples of each genre are arranged chronologically, although there are a few violations of this order for particular reasons. Historical considerations in themselves are naturally not paramount in introductory courses in literature, yet literary study cannot proceed without awareness of the fact that from one age to another changes take place in the meanings of words, in aesthetic conventions, in intellectual and moral assumptions, and in modes of behavior. The order of chronology is a first means to this necessary awareness.

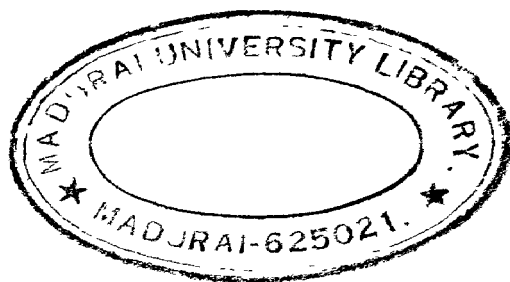
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I was peculiarly fortunate in the help I was given with this book and I am deeply grateful to those who gave it. The work on the footnotes was begun by Kent Hieatt, continued by David Thompson, and completed by Terry Schutz. Bernard Lionel Einbond of Hunter College kindly took in charge the task of checking the textual accuracy of the poems. Seeing the book through the press with Brian Heald was to me a revelation of what editorial intelligence, precision, and efficiency can be and I shall always remember our collaboration with pleasure. To Stanley Burnshaw I owe an especial debt of gratitude not only for his many valuable suggestions but also for his unfailing sympathy and his supernal patience.

New York, N.Y.
January 1967

L.T.

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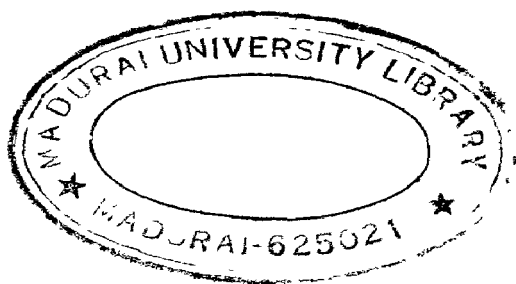
THE EXPERIENCE OF LITERATURE

DRAMA

OEDIPUS REX

SOPHOCLES

496-406 B.C.



PERSONS REPRESENTED

OEDIPUS
A PRIEST
KREON
TEIRESIAS

IOKASTE
MESSENGER
SHEPHERD OF LAÏOS
SECOND MESSENGER
CHORUS OF THEBAN ELDERS

SCENE

Before the palace of Oedipus, King of Thebes. A central door and two lateral doors open onto a platform which runs the length of the façade. On the platform, right and left, are altars; and three steps lead down into the "orchêstra," or chorus-ground. At the beginning of the action these steps are crowded by suppliants who have brought branches and chaplets of olive leaves and who sit in various attitudes of despair. OEDIPUS enters.

PROLOGUE

OEDIPUS. My children, generations of the living
In the line of Kadmos,¹ nursed at his ancient hearth:
Why have you strewn yourselves before these altars
In supplication, with your boughs and garlands?
The breath of incense rises from the city
With a sound of prayer and lamentation.

Children,

I would not have you speak through messengers,
And therefore I have come myself to hear you—
I, Oedipus, who bear the famous name.

[To a PRIEST.] You, there, since you are eldest in the company,
Speak for them all, tell me what preys upon you,
Whether you come in dread, or crave some blessing:
Tell me, and never doubt that I will help you
In every way I can; I should be heartless
Were I not moved to find you suppliant here.

PRIEST. Great Oedipus, O powerful king of Thebes!
You see how all the ages of our people
Cling to your altar steps: here are boys
Who can barely stand alone, and here are priests
By weight of age, as I am a priest of God,
And young men chosen from those yet unmarried;
As for the others, all that multitude,
They wait with olive chaplets² in the squares,
At the two shrines of Pallas,³ and where Apollo⁴
Speaks in the glowing embers.

Your own eyes

Must tell you: Thebes is tossed on a murdering sea
And can not lift her head from the death surge.
A rust consumes the buds and fruits of the earth;
The herds are sick; children die unborn,
And labor is vain. The god of plague and pyre
Raids like detestable lightning through the city,
And all the house of Kadmos is laid waste,

¹ Legendary founder of Thebes. This text of the play uses a transliteration of proper names that often differs from common usage. More frequently seen spellings are Cadmus, Creon, Tiresias, Jocasta (or Iocasta), Laius, Menoeceus, Phoebus, Athena, Bacchus, Dionysus, Polydorus, Cithaeron, Parnassus, Polybus, Phocis, Lycia, Cyllene, Polyneices, Eteocles.

² Wreaths of olive branches to be worn on the head; the olive symbolized peace.

³ Pallas Athenê, goddess of war, handicraft, and wisdom and patron goddess of Athens.

⁴ God of light and healing, among other things; one of the principal Greek gods. Apollo was thought to speak through the oracle at Delphi, where a priestess muttered incomprehensibly and was interpreted by priests or seers.

All emptied, and all darkened: Death alone
Battens upon the misery of Thebes.

You are not one of the immortal gods, we know;
Yet we have come to you to make our prayer
As to the man surest in mortal ways
And wisest in the ways of God. You saved us
From the Sphinx,⁵ that flinty singer, and the tribute
We paid to her so long; yet you were never
Better informed than we, nor could we teach you:
A god's touch, it seems, enabled you to help us.

Therefore, O mighty power, we turn to you:
Find us our safety, find us a remedy,
Whether by counsel of the gods or of men.
A king of wisdom tested in the past
Can act in a time of troubles, and act well.
Noblest of men, restore
Life to your city! Think how all men call you
Liberator for your boldness long ago;
Ah, when your years of kingship are remembered,
Let them not say *We rose, but later fell*—
Keep the State from going down in the storm!
Once, years ago, with happy augury,
You brought us fortune; be the same again!
No man questions your power to rule the land:
But rule over men, not over a dead city!
Ships are only hulls, high walls are nothing,
When no life moves in the empty passageways.

OEDIPUS. Poor children! You may be sure I know
All that you longed for in your coming here.
I know that you are deathly sick; and yet,
Sick as you are, not one is as sick as I.
Each of you suffers in himself alone
His anguish, not another's; but my spirit
Groans for the city, for myself, for you.

I was not sleeping, you are not waking me.
No, I have been in tears for a long while
And in my restless thought walked many ways.
In all my search I found one remedy,
And I have adopted it: I have sent Kreon,

⁵ A monster that, according to legend, had plagued Thebes, singing the riddle, "What is it that walks on four legs in the morning, on two at midday, and on three in the evening?" Those who could not answer were devoured, but Oedipus, when asked, promptly replied, "Man, for he crawls in infancy, walks erect in maturity, and uses a staff in old age." This was the correct answer, and the Sphinx, on receiving it, destroyed herself. Kreon, who acted as regent of Thebes after the death of her king, Laios, then offered Oedipus the throne and the hand of Iokaste, Laios' widow and Kreon's sister.

Son of Menoikeus, brother of the Queen,
To Delphi, Apollo's place of revelation,
To learn there, if he can,
What act or pledge of mine may save the city.
I have counted the days, and now, this very day,
I am troubled, for he has overstayed his time.
What is he doing? He has been gone too long.
Yet whenever he comes back, I should do ill
Not to take any action the god orders.

PRIEST. It is a timely promise. At this instant
They tell me Kreon is here.

OEDIPUS. O Lord Apollo!
May his news be fair as his face is radiant!

PRIEST. Good news, I gather: he is crowned with bay,⁶
The chaplet is thick with berries.

OEDIPUS. We shall soon know;
He is near enough to hear us now. [*Enter KREON*]

O Prince:

Brother: son of Menoikeus:
What answer do you bring us from the God?

KREON. A strong one. I can tell you, great afflictions
Will turn out well, if they are taken well.

OEDIPUS. What was the oracle? These vague words
Leave me still hanging between hope and fear.

KREON. Is it your pleasure to hear me with all these
Gathered around us? I am prepared to speak,
But should we not go in?

OEDIPUS. Speak to them all.
It is for them I suffer, more than for myself.

KREON. Then I will tell you what I heard at Delphi.
In plain words

The god commands us to expel from the land of Thebes
An old defilement we are sheltering.

It is a deathly thing, beyond cure;
We must not let it feed upon us longer

OEDIPUS. What defilement? How shall we rid ourselves of it?

KREON. By exile or death, blood for blood. It was
Murder that brought the plague-wind on the city.

OEDIPUS. Murder of whom? Surely the god has named him?

KREON. My lord: Laios once ruled this land,
Before you came to govern us.

OEDIPUS. I know;
I learned of him from others; I never saw him.

KREON. He was murdered; and Apollo commands us now
To take revenge upon whoever killed him.

OEDIPUS. Upon whom? Where are they? Where shall we find a clue
To solve that crime, after so many years?

⁶ Laurel, an emblem of victory or excellence.

KREON. Here in this land, he said. Search reveals
Things that escape an inattentive man.

OEDIPUS. Tell me: Was Laios murdered in his house,
Or in the fields, or in some foreign country?

KREON. He said he planned to make a pilgrimage.
He did not come home again.

OEDIPUS. And was there no one,
No witness, no companion, to tell what happened?

KREON. They were all killed but one, and he got away
So frightened that he could remember one thing only.

OEDIPUS. What was that one thing? One may be the key
To everything, if we resolve to use it.

KREON. He said that a band of highwaymen attacked them,
Outnumbered them, and overwhelmed the King.

OEDIPUS. Strange, that a highwayman should be so daring—
Unless some faction here bribed him to do it.

KREON. We thought of that. But after Laios' death
New troubles arose and we had no avenger.

OEDIPUS. What troubles could prevent your hunting down the killers?

KREON. The riddling Sphinx's song
Made us deaf to all mysteries but her own.

OEDIPUS. Then once more I must bring what is dark to light.
It is most fitting that Apollo shows,

As you do, this compunction for the dead.

You shall see how I stand by you, as I should,

Avenging this country and the god as well,

And not as though it were for some distant friend,

But for my own sake, to be rid of evil.

Whoever killed King Laios might—who knows?—

Lay violent hands even on me—and soon.

I act for the murdered king in my own interest.

Come, then, my children: leave the altar steps,

Lift up your olive boughs!

One of you go

And summon the people of Kadmos to gather here.

I will do all that I can; you may tell them that. [*Exit a PAGE.*]

So, with the help of God.

We shall be saved—or else indeed we are lost.

PRIEST. Let us rise, children. It was for this we came,
And now the King has promised it.

Phoibos⁷ has sent us an oracle; may he descend

Himself to save us and drive out the plague.

[*Exeunt OEDIPUS and KREON into the palace by the central door. The PRIEST
and the SUPPLIANTS disperse right and left. After a short pause the CHORUS
enters the orchēstra.*]

⁷ Phoibos Apollo.

PARODOS⁸

CHORUS. What is God⁹ singing in his profound
Delphi of gold and shadow?
What oracle for Thebes, the sunwhipped¹⁰ city?

[STROPHE 1]

Fear unjoints me, the roots of my heart tremble.

Now I remember, O Healer, your power and wonder:
Will you send doom like a sudden cloud, or weave it
Like nightfall of the past?

Speak to me, tell me, O
Child of golden Hope, immortal Voice.

Let me pray to Athenê, the immortal daughter of Zeus,
And to Artemis her sister
Who keeps her famous throne in the market ring,¹¹

[ANTISTROPHE 1]

And to Apollo, archer from distant heaven—¹²

O gods, descend! Like three streams leap against
The fires of our grief, the fires of darkness;
Be swift to bring us rest!

As in the old time from the brilliant house
Of air you stepped to save us, come again!

Now our afflictions have no end,
Now all our stricken host lies down
And no man fights off death with his mind;

[STROPHE 2]

The noble plowland bears no grain,
And groaning mothers can not bear—

See, how our lives like birds take wing,
Like sparks that fly when a fire soars,
To the shore of the god of evening.¹³

The plague burns on, it is pitiless,
Though pallid children laden with death
Lie unwept in the stony ways,

[ANTISTROPHE 2]

And old gray women by every path
Flock to the strand about the altars

⁸ This is an ode chanted by the Chorus, who remain on stage hereafter and comment, always in chanted odes, on the action of the play. When the Chorus participates in the actual dialogue, only its leader (Choragos) speaks, but he speaks for the entire group.

⁹ Apollo, worship of whom sometimes approached monotheism.

¹⁰ Whipped by Apollo, who was sometimes identified with the Sun-god.

¹¹ Artemis was the goddess of hunting; she was usually associated with forests and hills, where wild animals predominate, but was sometimes thought of as a city goddess.

¹² Apollo was also the god of archery.

¹³ Death.

There to strike their breasts and cry
Worship of Phoibos in wailing prayers:
Be kind, God's golden child!

There are no swords in this attack by fire,
No shields, but we are ringed with cries.

[STROPHE 3]

Send the besieger plunging from our homes
Into the vast sea-room of the Atlantic
Or into the waves that foam eastward of Thrace—¹⁴

For the day ravages what the night spares—
Destroy our enemy, lord of the thunder!
Let him be riven by lightning from heaven!

Phoibos Apollo, stretch the sun's bowstring,
That golden cord, until it sing for us,
Flashing arrows in heaven!

[ANTISTROPHE 3]

Artemis, Huntress,
Race with flaring lights upon our mountains!

O scarlet god, O golden-banded brow,
O Theban Bacchos¹⁵ in a storm of Maenads,¹⁶ [*Enter OEDIPUS, center.*]
Whirl upon Death, that all the Undying hate!
Come with blinding torches, come in joy!

SCENE I

OEDIPUS. Is this your prayer? It may be answered. Come,
Listen to me, act as the crisis demands,
And you shall have relief from all these evils.

Until now I was a stranger to this tale,
As I had been a stranger to the crime.
Could I track down the murderer without a clue?
But now, friends,
As one who became a citizen after the murder,
I make this proclamation to all Thebans:

If any man knows by whose hand Laios, son of Labdakos,
Met his death, I direct that man to tell me everything,
No matter what he fears for having so long withheld it.
Let it stand as promised that no further trouble
Will come to him, but he may leave the land in safety.

Moreover: If anyone knows the murderer to be foreign,
Let him not keep silent: he shall have his reward from me.

¹⁴ The eastern half of the Balkan Peninsula.

¹⁵ Dionysos; god of wine who is frequently represented with a scarlet face.

¹⁶ Female attendants of Dionysos who were inspired to ecstatic frenzy by the god.

However, if he does conceal it; if any man
Fearing for his friend or for himself disobeys this edict,
Hear what I propose to do:

I solemnly forbid the people of this country,
Where power and throne are mine, ever to receive that man
Or speak to him, no matter who he is, or let him
Join in sacrifice, lustration, or in prayer.
I decree that he be driven from every house,
Being, as he is, corruption itself to us: the Delphic
Voice of Apollo has pronounced this revelation.
Thus I associate myself with the oracle
And take the side of the murdered king.

As for the criminal, I pray to God—
Whether it be a lurking thief, or one of a number—
I pray that that man's life be consumed in evil and wretchedness.
And as for me, this curse applies no less
If it should turn out that the culprit is my guest here,
Sharing my hearth.

You have heard the penalty.

I lay it on you now to attend to this
For my sake, for Apollo's, for the sick
Sterile city that heaven has abandoned.
Suppose the oracle had given you no command:
Should this defilement go uncleansed for ever?
You should have found the murderer: your king,
A noble king, had been destroyed!

Now I,

Having the power that he held before me,
Having his bed, begetting children there
Upon his wife, as he would have, had he lived—
Their son would have been my children's brother,
If Laios had had luck in fatherhood!
(And now his bad fortune has struck him down)—
I say I take the son's part, just as though
I were his son, to press the fight for him
And see it won! I'll find the hand that brought
Death to Labdakos' and Polydoros' child,
Heir of Kadmos' and Agenor's line.
And as for those who fail me,
May the gods deny them the fruit of the earth,
Fruit of the womb, and may they rot utterly!
Let them be wretched as we are wretched, and worse!

For you, for loyal Thebans, and for all
Who finds my actions right, I pray the favor
Of justice, and of all the immortal gods.

CHORAGOS. Since I am under oath, my lord, I swear
I did not do the murder, I can not name

The murderer. Phoibos ordained the search;
Why did he not say who the culprit was?

OEDIPUS. An honest question. But no man in the world
Can make the gods do more than the gods will.

CHORAGOS. There is an alternative, I think—

OEDIPUS. Tell me.

Any or all, you must not fail to tell me.

CHORAGOS. A lord clairvoyant¹⁷ to the lord Apollo,
As we all know, is the skilled Teiresias.

One might learn much about this from him, Oedipus.

OEDIPUS. I am not wasting time:

Kreon spoke of this, and I have sent for him—

Twice, in fact; it is strange that he is not here.

CHORAGOS. The other matter—that old report—seems useless.

OEDIPUS. What was that? I am interested in all reports.

CHORAGOS. The King was said to have been killed by highwaymen.

OEDIPUS. I know. But we have no witnesses to that.

CHORAGOS. If the killer can feel a particle of dread,
Your curse will bring him out of hiding!

OEDIPUS. No.

The man who dared that act will fear no curse.

[Enter the blind seer TEIRESIAS, led by a PAGE.]

CHORAGOS. But there is one man who may detect the criminal.
This is Teiresias, this is the holy prophet
In whom, alone of all men, truth was born.

OEDIPUS. Teiresias: seer: student of mysteries,
Of all that's taught and all that no man tells,
Secrets of Heaven and secrets of the earth:
Blind though you are, you know the city lies
Sick with plague; and from this plague, my lord,
We find that you alone can guard or save us.

Possibly you did not hear the messengers?
Apollo, when we sent to him,
Sent us back word that this great pestilence
Would lift, but only if we established clearly
The identity of those who murdered Laios.
They must be killed or exiled.

Can you use

Birdflight¹⁸ or any art of divination
To purify yourself, and Thebes, and me
From this contagion? We are in your hands.
There is no fairer duty
Than that of helping others in distress.

TEIRESIAS. How dreadful knowledge of the truth can be
When there's no help in truth! I knew this well,
But did not act on it: else I should not have come.

¹⁷ Seer or priest.

¹⁸ Augurs observed the flight and behavior of birds, which supposedly revealed the future or the forgotten or unknown past.

OEDIPUS. What is troubling you? Why are your eyes so cold?

TEIRESIAS. Let me go home. Bear your own fate, and I'll
Bear mine. It is better so: trust what I say.

OEDIPUS. What you say is ungracious and unhelpful
To your native country. Do not refuse to speak.

TEIRESIAS. When it comes to speech, your own is neither temperate
Nor opportune. I wish to be more prudent.

OEDIPUS. In God's name, we all beg you—

TEIRESIAS. You are all ignorant.
No; I will never tell you what I know.
Now it is my misery; then, it would be yours.

OEDIPUS. What! You do know something, and will not tell us?
You would betray us and wreck the State?

TEIRESIAS. I do not intend to torture myself, or you.
Why persist in asking? You will not persuade me.

OEDIPUS. What a wicked old man you are! You'd try a stone's
Patience! Out with it! Have you no feeling at all?

TEIRESIAS. You call me unfeeling. If you could only see
The nature of your own feelings . . .

OEDIPUS. Why,
Who would not feel as I do? Who could endure
Your arrogance toward the city?

TEIRESIAS. What does it matter?
Whether I speak or not, it is bound to come.

OEDIPUS. Then, if 'it' is bound to come, you are bound to tell me.

TEIRESIAS. No, I will not go on. Rage as you please.

OEDIPUS. Rage? Why not!
And I'll tell you what I think:
You planned it, you had it done, you all but
Killed him with your own hands: if you had eyes,
I'd say the crime was yours, and yours alone.

TEIRESIAS. So? I charge you, then,
Abide by the proclamation you have made:
From this day forth
Never speak again to these men or to me;
You yourself are the pollution of this country.

OEDIPUS. You dare say that! Can you possibly think you have
Some way of going free, after such insolence?

TEIRESIAS. I have gone free. It is the truth sustains me.

OEDIPUS. Who taught you shamelessness? It was not your craft.

TEIRESIAS. You did. You made me speak. I did not want to.

OEDIPUS. Speak what? Let me hear it again more clearly.

TEIRESIAS. Was it not clear before? Are you tempting me?

OEDIPUS. I did not understand. Say it again.

TEIRESIAS. I say that you are the murderer whom you seek.

OEDIPUS. Now twice you have spat out infamy. You'll pay for it!

TEIRESIAS. Would you care for more? Do you wish to be really angry?

OEDIPUS. Say what you will. Whatever you say is worthless.

TEIRESIAS. I say you live in hideous shame with those
Most dear to you. You can not see the evil.

OEDIPUS. Can you go on babbling like this for ever?

TEIRESIAS. I can, if there is power in truth.

OEDIPUS.

There is:

But not for you, not for you,

You sightless, witless, senseless, mad old man!

TEIRESIAS. You are the madman. There is no one here
Who will not curse you soon, as you curse me.

OEDIPUS. You child of total night! I would not touch you;
Neither would any man who sees the sun.

TEIRESIAS. True: it is not from you my fate will come.
That lies within Apollo's competence,
As it is his concern.

OEDIPUS. Tell me, who made
These fine discoveries? Kreon? or someone else?

TEIRESIAS. Kreon is no threat. You weave your own doom.

OEDIPUS. Wealth, power, craft of statesmanship!
Kingly position, everywhere admired!
What savage envy is stored up against these,
If Kreon, whom I trusted, Kreon my friend,
For this great office which the city once
Put in my hands unsought—if for this power
Kreon desires in secret to destroy me!

He has bought this decrepit fortune-teller, this
Collector of dirty pennies, this prophet fraud—
Why, he is no more clairvoyant than I am!

Tell us:

Has your mystic mummary ever approached the truth?
When that hellcat the Sphinx was performing here,
What help were you to these people?
Her magic was not for the first man who came along:
It demanded a real exorcist. Your birds—
What good were they? or the gods, for the matter of that?
But I came by.

Oedipus, the simple man, who knows nothing—
I thought it out for myself, no birds helped me!
And this is the man you think you can destroy,
That you may be close to Kreon when he's king!
Well, you and your friend Kreon, it seems to me,
Will suffer most. If you were not an old man,
You would have paid already for your plot.

CHORAGOS. We can not see that his words or yours
Have been spoken except in anger, Oedipus,
And of anger we have no need. How to accomplish
The god's will best: that is what most concerns us.

TEIRESIAS. You are a king. But where argument's concerned
I am your man, as much a king as you.

I am not your servant, but Apollo's.
I have no need of Kreon's name.

Listen to me. You mock my blindness, do you?
But I say that you, with both your eyes, are blind:
You can not see the wretchedness of your life,
Nor in whose house you live, no, nor with whom.
Who are your father and mother? Can you tell me?
You do not even know the blind wrongs
That you have done them, on earth and in the world below.
But the double lash of your parents' curse will whip you
Out of this land some day, with only night
Upon your precious eyes.
Your cries then—where will they not be heard?
What fastness of Kithairon¹⁹ will not echo them?
And that bridal-descant of yours—you'll know it then,
The song they sang when you came here to Thebes
And found your misguided berthing.
All this, and more, that you can not guess at now,
Will bring you to yourself among your children.

Be angry, then. Curse Kreon. Curse my words.
I tell you, no man that walks upon the earth
Shall be rooted out more horribly than you.

OEDIPUS. Am I to bear this from him?—Damnation
Take you! Out of this place! Out of my sight!

TEIRESIAS. I would not have come at all if you had not asked me.

OEDIPUS. Could I have told that you'd talk nonsense, that
You'd come here to make a fool of yourself, and of me?

TEIRESIAS. A fool? Your parents thought me sane enough.

OEDIPUS. My parents again!—Wait: who were my parents?

TEIRESIAS. This day will give you a father, and break your heart.

OEDIPUS. Your infantile riddles! Your damned abracadabra!

TEIRESIAS. You were a great man once at solving riddles.

OEDIPUS. Mock me with that if you like; you will find it true.

TEIRESIAS. It was true enough. It brought about your ruin.

OEDIPUS. But if it saved this town?

TEIRESIAS [*To the PAGE*]. Boy, give me your hand.

OEDIPUS. Yes, boy; lead him away.

—While you are here

We can do nothing. Go; leave us in peace.

TEIRESIAS. I will go when I have said what I have to say.

How can you hurt me? And I tell you again:

The man you have been looking for all this time,

The damned man, the murderer of Laios,

That man is in Thebes. To your mind he is foreign-born,

But it will soon be shown that he is a Theban,

A revelation that will fail to please.

¹⁹ A mountain near Thebes.

A blind man,
 Who has his eyes now; a penniless man, who is rich now;
 And he will go tapping the strange earth with his staff.
 To the children with whom he lives now he will be
 Brother and father—the very same; to her
 Who bore him, son and husband—the very same
 Who came to his father's bed, wet with his father's blood.

Enough. Go think that over.

If later you find error in what I have said,
 You may say that I have no skill in prophecy.

[Exit TEIRESIAS, led by his PAGE. OEDIPUS goes into the palace.]

ODE I

CHORUS. The Delphic stone of prophecies²⁰
 Remembers ancient regicide
 And a still bloody hand.
 That killer's hour of flight has come.
 He must be stronger than riderless
 Coursers of untiring wind,
 For the son of Zeus²¹ armed with his father's thunder
 Leaps in lightning after him;
 And the Furies²² hold his track, the sad Furies.

[STROPHE 1]

Holy Parnassos' peak of snow²³
 Flashes and blinds that secret man,
 That all shall hunt him down:
 Though he may roam the forest shade
 Like a bull gone wild from pasture
 To rage through glooms of stone.
 Doom comes down on him; flight will not avail him;
 For the world's heart calls him desolate,
 And the immortal voices follow, for ever follow.

[ANTISTROPHE 1]

But now a wilder thing is heard
 From the old man skilled at hearing Fate in the wing-beat of a bird.
 Bewildered as a blown bird, my soul hovers and can not find
 Foothold in this debate, or any reason or rest of mind.
 But no man ever brought—none can bring

[STROPHE 2]

²⁰ The shrine at Delphi contained a large ceremonial stone that was called, because Delphi was thought to be at the center of the earth, Earth's Navel.

²¹ Apollo.

²² Hideous female deities who pursued and drove mad those who had committed such heinous crimes as patricide.

²³ Parnassos was a mountain with two peaks, one of which was consecrated to Apollo and the Muses (goddesses of arts and sciences) and the other to Dionysos; the "peak of snow" would be the peak of Apollo and the Muses. Delphi was located on the southern slope of Parnassos.

Proof of strife between Thebes' royal house,
Labdakos' line,²⁴ and the son of Polybos;²⁵
And never until now has any man brought word
Of Laios' dark death staining Oedipus the King.

Divine Zeus and Apollo hold [ANTISTROPHE 2]
Perfect intelligence alone of all tales ever told;
And well though this diviner²⁶ works, he works in his own night;
No man can judge that rough unknown or trust in second sight,
For wisdom changes hands among the wise.
Shall I believe my great lord criminal
At a raging word that a blind old man let fall?
I saw him, when the carrion woman²⁷ faced him of old,
Prove his heroic mind. These evil words are lies.

SCENE II

KREON. Men of Thebes:
I am told that heavy accusations
Have been brought against me by King Oedipus.
I am not the kind of man to bear this tamely.
If in these present difficulties
He holds me accountable for any harm to him
Through anything I have said or done—why, then,
I do not value life in this dishonor.

It is not as though this rumor touched upon
Some private indiscretion. The matter is grave.
The fact is that I am being called disloyal
To the State, to my fellow citizens, to my friends.

CHORAGOS. He may have spoken in anger, not from his mind.

KREON. But did you not hear him say I was the one
Who seduced the old prophet into lying?

CHORAGOS. The thing was said; I do not know how seriously.

KREON. But you were watching him! Were his eyes steady?
Did he look like a man in his right mind?

CHORAGOS. I do not know.

I can not judge the behavior of great men.
But here is the King himself. [*Enter OEDIPUS.*]

OEDIPUS. So you dared come back.
Why? How brazen of you to come to my house,
You murderer!

²⁴ The family of Laios.

²⁵ Polybos was thought to be Oedipus' father.

²⁶ Teiresias.

²⁷ The Sphinx.

Do you think I do not know
That you plotted to kill me, plotted to steal my throne?
Tell me, in God's name: am I coward, a fool,
That you should dream you could accomplish this?
A fool who could not see your slippery game?
A coward, not to fight back when I saw it?
You are the fool, Kreon, are you not? hoping
Without support or friends to get a throne?
Thrones may be won or bought: you could do neither.

KREON. Now listen to me. You have talked; let me talk, too.

You can not judge unless you know the facts.

OEDIPUS. You speak well: there is one fact; but I find it hard
To learn from the deadliest enemy I have.

KREON. That above all I must dispute with you.

OEDIPUS. That above all I will not hear you deny.

KREON. If you think there is anything good in being stubborn
Against all reason, then I say you are wrong.

OEDIPUS. If you think a man can sin against his own kind
And not be punished for it, I say you are mad.

KREON. I agree. But tell me: what have I done to you?

OEDIPUS. You advised me to send for that wizard, did you not?

KREON. I did. I should do it again.

OEDIPUS. Very well. Now tell me:

How long has it been since Laios—

KREON. What of Laios?

OEDIPUS. Since he vanished in that onset by the road?

KREON. It was long ago, a long time.

OEDIPUS. And this prophet,

Was he practicing here then?

KREON. He was; and with honor, as now.

OEDIPUS. Did he speak of me at that time?

KREON. He never did;

At least, not when I was present.

OEDIPUS. But . . . the enquiry?²⁸

I suppose you held one?

KREON. We did, but we learned nothing.

OEDIPUS. Why did the prophet not speak against me then?

KREON. I do not know; and I am the kind of man

Who holds his tongue when he has no facts to go on.

OEDIPUS. There's one fact that you know, and you could tell it.

KREON. What fact is that? If I know it, you shall have it.

OEDIPUS. If he were not involved with you, he could not say
That it was I who murdered Laios.

KREON. If he says that, you are the one that knows it!—

But now it is my turn to question you.

OEDIPUS. Put your questions. I am no murderer.

²⁸ Into Oedipus' background.

KREON. First, then: you married my sister?

OEDIPUS. I married your sister.

KREON. And you rule the kingdom equally with her?

OEDIPUS. Everything that she wants she has from me.

KREON. And I am the third, equal to both of you?

OEDIPUS. That is why I call you a bad friend.

KREON. No. Reason it out, as I have done.

Think of this first: Would any sane man prefer
Power, with all a king's anxieties,
To that same power and the grace of sleep?
Certainly not I.

I have never longed for the king's power—only his rights.
Would any wise man differ from me in this?
As matters stand, I have my way in everything
With your consent, and no responsibilities.
If I were king, I should be a slave to policy.
How could I desire a sceptre more
Than what is now mine—untroubled influence?
No, I have not gone mad; I need no honors,
Except those with the perquisites I have now.
I am welcome everywhere; every man salutes me,
And those who want your favor seek my ear,
Since I know how to manage what they ask.
Should I exchange this ease for that anxiety?
Besides, no sober mind is treasonable.
I hate anarchy
And never would deal with any man who likes it.

Test what I have said. Go to the priestess
At Delphi, ask if I quoted her correctly.
And as for this other thing: if I am found
Guilty of treason with Teiresias,
Then sentence me to death. You have my word
It is a sentence I should cast my vote for—
But not without evidence!

You do wrong

When you take good men for bad, bad men for good.
A true friend thrown aside—why, life itself
Is not more precious!

In time you will know this well:

For time, and time alone, will show the just man,
Though scoundrels are discovered in a day.

CHORAGOS. This is well said, and a prudent man would ponder it.
Judgments too quickly formed are dangerous.

OEDIPUS. But is he not quick in his duplicity?
And shall I not be quick to parry him?
Would you have me stand still, hold my peace, and let
This man win everything, through my inaction?

KREON. And you want—what is it, then? To banish me?
 OEDIPUS. No, not exile. It is your death I want,
 So that all the world may see what treason means.
 KREON. You will persist, then? You will not believe me?
 OEDIPUS. How can I believe you?
 KREON. Then you are a fool.
 OEDIPUS. To save myself?
 KREON. In justice, think of me.
 OEDIPUS. You are evil incarnate.
 KREON. But suppose that you are wrong?
 OEDIPUS. Still I must rule.
 KREON. But not if you rule badly.
 OEDIPUS. O city, city!
 KREON. It is my city, too!
 CHORAGOS. Now, my lords, be still. I see the Queen,
 Iokastè, coming from her palace chambers;
 And it is time she came, for the sake of you both.
 This dreadful quarrel can be resolved through her. [*Enter IOKASTE.*]
 IOKASTE. Poor foolish men, what wicked din is this? *noies*
 With Thebes sick to death, is it not shameful
 That you should rake some private quarrel up?
 [*To OEDIPUS.*] Come into the house.

—And you, Kreon, go now:
 Let us have no more of this tumult over nothing.
 KREON. Nothing? No, sister: what your husband plans for me
 Is one of two great evils: exile or death.
 OEDIPUS. He is right.

Why, woman I have caught him squarely
 Plotting against my life.

KREON. No! Let me die
 Accurst if ever I have wished you harm!
 IOKASTE. Ah, believe it, Oedipus!
 In the name of the gods, respect this oath of his
 For my sake, for the sake of these people here!

[STROPHE I]

CHORAGOS. Open your mind to her, my lord. Be ruled by her, I beg you!
 OEDIPUS. What would you have me do?
 CHORAGOS. Respect Kreon's word. He has never spoken like a fool,
 And now he has sworn an oath.
 OEDIPUS. You know what you ask?
 CHORAGOS. I do.
 OEDIPUS. Speak on, then.
 CHORAGOS. A friend so sworn should not be baited so,
 In blind malice, and without final proof.
 OEDIPUS. You are aware, I hope, that what you say
 Means death for me, or exile at the least.

CHORAGOS. No, I swear by Helios,²⁹ first in Heaven!
May I die friendless and accurst,
The worst of deaths, if ever I meant that!
It is the withering fields
That hurt my sick heart:
Must we bear all these ills,
And now your bad blood as well?

[STROPHE 2]

OEDIPUS. Then let him go. And let me die, if I must,
Or be driven by him in shame from the land of Thebes.
It is your unhappiness, and not his talk,
That touches me.

As for him—
Wherever he goes, hatred will follow him.
KREON. Ugly in yielding, as you were ugly in rage!
Natures like yours chiefly torment themselves.
OEDIPUS. Can you not go? Can you not leave me?
KREON. I can.
You do not know me; but the city knows me,
And in its eyes I am just, if not in yours. [*Exit* KREON.]

[ANTISTROPHE 1]

CHORAGOS. Lady Iokastê, did you not ask the King to go to his chambers?
IOKASTE. First tell me what has happened.
CHORAGOS. There was suspicion without evidence; yet it rankled
As even false charges will.
IOKASTE. On both sides?
CHORAGOS. On both.
IOKASTE. But what was said?
CHORAGOS. Oh let it rest, let it be done with!
Have we not suffered enough?
OEDIPUS. You see to what your decency has brought you:
You have made difficulties where my heart saw none.

[ANTISTROPHE 2]

CHORAGOS. Oedipus, it is not once only I have told you—
You must know I should count myself unwise
To the point of madness, should I now forsake you—
You, under whose hand,
In the storm of another time,
Our dear land sailed out free.
But now stand fast at the helm!

IOKASTE. In God's name, Oedipus, inform your wife as well:
Why are you so set in this hard anger?

OEDIPUS. I will tell you, for none of these men deserves

²⁹ The Sun-god.

My confidence as you do. It is Kreon's work,
His treachery, his plotting against me.

IOKASTE. Go on, if you can make this clear to me.

OEDIPUS. He charges me with the murder of Laïos.

IOKASTE. Has he some knowledge? Or does he speak from hearsay?

OEDIPUS. He would not commit himself to such a charge,

But he has brought in that damnable soothsayer
To tell his story.

IOKASTE. Set your mind at rest.

If it is a question of soothsayers, I tell you

That you will find no man whose craft gives knowledge
Of the unknowable.

Here is my proof:

An oracle was reported to Laïos once

(I will not say from Phoibos himself, but from

His appointed ministers, at any rate)

That his doom would be death at the hands of his own son—

His son, born of his flesh and of mine!

Now, you remember the story: Laïos was killed

By marauding strangers where three highways meet;

But his child had not been three days in this world

Before the King had pierced the baby's ankles³⁰

And left him to die on a lonely mountainside.

Thus, Apollo never caused that child

To kill his father, and it was not Laïos' fate

To die at the hands of his son, as he had feared.

This is what prophets and prophecies are worth!

Have no dread of them.

It is God himself

Who can show us what he wills, in his own way.

OEDIPUS. How strange a shadowy memory crossed my mind,

Just now while you were speaking; it chilled my heart.

IOKASTE. What do you mean? What memory do you speak of?

OEDIPUS. If I understand you, Laïos was killed

At a place where three roads meet.

IOKASTE. So it was said;

We have no later story.

OEDIPUS. Where did it happen?

IOKASTE. Phokis, it is called: at a place where the Theban Way

Divides into the roads toward Delphi and Daulia.

OEDIPUS. When?

IOKASTE. We had the news not long before you came

And proved the right to your succession here.

OEDIPUS. Ah, what net has God been weaving for me?

IOKASTE. Oedipus! Why does this trouble you?

³⁰ Perhaps to prevent his ghost from walking.

OEDIPUS.

Do not ask me yet.

First, tell me how Laïos looked, and tell me
How old he was.

IOKASTE. He was tall, his hair just touched
With white; his form was not unlike your own.

OEDIPUS. I think that I myself may be accurst
By my own ignorant edict.

IOKASTE. You speak strangely.
It makes me tremble to look at you, my King.

OEDIPUS. I am not sure that the blind man can not see.
But I should know better if you were to tell me—

IOKASTE. Anything—though I dread to hear you ask it.

OEDIPUS. Was the King lightly escorted, or did he ride
With a large company, as a ruler should?

IOKASTE. There were five men with him in all: one was a herald;
And a single chariot, which he was driving.

OEDIPUS. Alas, that makes it plain enough!

But who—

Who told you how it happened?

IOKASTE. A household servant,
The only one to escape.

OEDIPUS. And is he still
A servant of ours?

IOKASTE. No; for when he came back at last
And found you enthroned in the place of the dead king,
He came to me, touched my hand with his, and begged
That I would send him away to the frontier district
Where only the shepherds go—
As far away from the city as I could send him.
I granted his prayer; for although the man was a slave,
He had earned more than this favor at my hands.

OEDIPUS. Can he be called back quickly?

IOKASTE. Easily.

But why?

OEDIPUS. I have taken too much upon myself
Without enquiry; therefore I wish to consult him.

IOKASTE. Then he shall come.

But am I not one also

To whom you might confide these fears of yours?

OEDIPUS. That is your right; it will not be denied you,
Now least of all; for I have reached a pitch
Of wild foreboding. Is there anyone
To whom I should sooner speak?

Polybos of Corinth is my father.

My mother is a Dorian: Meropê.

I grew up chief among the men of Corinth

Until a strange thing happened—

Not worth my passion, it may be, but strange.

At a feast, a drunken man maundering in his cups
Cries out that I am not my father's son!
I contained myself that night, though I felt anger
And a sinking heart. The next day I visited
My father and mother, and questioned them. They stormed,
Calling it all the slanderous rant of a fool;
And this relieved me. Yet the suspicion
Remained always aching in my mind;
I knew there was talk; I could not rest;
And finally, saying nothing to my parents,
I went to the shrine at Delphi.

The god dismissed my question without reply;
He spoke of other things.

Some were clear,
Full of wretchedness, dreadful, unbearable:
As, that I should lie with my own mother, breed
Children from whom all men would turn their eyes;
And that I should be my father's murderer.

I heard all this, and fled. And from that day
Corinth to me was only in the stars
Descending in that quarter of the sky,
As I wandered farther and farther on my way
To a land where I should never see the evil
Sung by the oracle. And I came to this country
Where, so you say, King Laïos was killed.

I will tell you all that happened there, my lady.

There were three highways
Coming together at a place I passed;
And there a herald came towards me, and a chariot
Drawn by horses, with a man such as you describe
Seated in it. The groom leading the horses
Forced me off the road at his lord's command;
But as this charioteer lurched over towards me
I struck him in my rage. The old man saw me
And brought his double goad down upon my head
As I came abreast.

He was paid back, and more!
Swinging my club in this right hand I knocked him
Out of his car, and he rolled on the ground.

I killed him.

I killed them all.

Now if that stranger and Laïos were—kin,
Where is a man more miserable than I?
More hated by the gods? Citizen and alien alike
Must never shelter me or speak to me—
I must be shunned by all.

And I myself
Pronounced this malediction upon myself!

Think of it: I have touched you with these hands,
These hands that killed your husband. What defilement!

Am I all evil, then? It must be so,
Since I must flee from Thebes, yet never again
See my own countrymen, my own country,
For fear of joining my mother in marriage
And killing Polybos, my father.

Ah,
If I was created so, born to this fate,
Who could deny the savagery of God?

O holy majesty of heavenly powers!
May I never see that day! Never!
Rather let me vanish from the race of men
Than know the abomination destined me!

CHORAGOS. We too, my lord, have felt dismay at this.

But there is hope: you have yet to hear the shepherd.

OEDIPUS. Indeed, I fear no other hope is left me.

IOKASTE. What do you hope from him when he comes?

OEDIPUS.

This much:

If his account of the murder tallies with yours,
Then I am cleared.

IOKASTE. What was it that I said
Of such importance?

OEDIPUS. Why, 'marauders', you said,
Killed the King, according to this man's story.
If he maintains that still, if there were several,
Clearly the guilt is not mine: I was alone.
But if he says one man, singlehanded, did it,
Then the evidence all points to me.

IOKASTE. You may be sure that he said there were several;
And can he call back that story now? He can not.
The whole city heard it as plainly as I.
But suppose he alters some detail of it:
He can not ever show that Laios' death
Fulfilled the oracle: for Apollo said
My child was doomed to kill him; and my child—
Poor baby!—it was my child that died first.

No. From now on, where oracles are concerned,
I would not waste a second thought on any.

OEDIPUS. You may be right.

But come: let someone go
For the shepherd at once. This matter must be settled.

IOKASTE. I will send for him.

I would not wish to cross you in anything,
And surely not in this.—Let us go in. [*Exeunt into the palace.*]

ODE II

CHORUS. Let me be reverent in the ways of right,
Lowly the paths I journey on;
Let all my words and actions keep
The laws of the pure universe
From highest Heaven handed down.
For Heaven is their bright nurse,
Those generations of the realms of light;
Ah, never of mortal kind were they begot,
Nor are they slaves of memory, lost in sleep:
Their Father is greater than Time, and ages not.

[STROPHE 1]

The tyrant is a child of Pride
Who drinks from his great sickening cup
Recklessness and vanity,
Until from his high crest headlong
He plummets to the dust of hope.
That strong man is not strong.
But let no fair ambition be denied;
May God protect the wrestler for the State
In government, in comely policy,
Who will fear God, and on His ordinance wait.

[ANTISTROPHE 1]

Haughtiness and the high hand of disdain
Tempt and outrage God's holy law;
And any mortal who dares hold
No immortal Power in awe
Will be caught up in a net of pain:
The price for which his levity is sold.
Let each man take due earnings, then,
And keep his hands from holy things,
And from blasphemy stand apart—
Else the crackling blast of heaven
Blows on his head, and on his desperate heart.
Though fools will honor impious men,
In their cities no tragic poet sings.

[STROPHE 2]

Shall we lose faith in Delphi's obscurities,
We who have heard the world's core
Discredited, and the sacred wood
Of Zeus at Elis praised no more?
The deeds and the strange prophecies
Must make a pattern yet to be understood.
Zeus, if indeed you are lord of all,
Throned in light over night and day,
Mirror this in your endless mind:
Our masters call the oracle

[ANTISTROPHE 2]

Words on the wind, and the Delphic vision blind!
Their hearts no longer know Apollo,
And reverence for the gods has died away.

SCENE III

Enter IOKASTE

IOKASTE. Princes of Thebes, it has occurred to me
To visit the altars of the gods, bearing
These branches as a suppliant, and this incense.
Our King is not himself: his noble soul
Is overwrought with fantasies of dread,
Else he would consider
The new prophecies in the light of the old.
He will listen to any voice that speaks disaster,
And my advice goes for nothing. [*She approaches the altar, right.*]

To you, then, Apollo,
Lycéan lord,³¹ since you are nearest, I turn in prayer.

Receive these offerings, and grant us deliverance
From defilement. Our hearts are heavy with fear
When we see our leader distracted, as helpless sailors
Are terrified by the confusion of their helmsman.

[*Enter* MESSENGER.]

MESSENGER. Friends, no doubt you can direct me:
Where shall I find the house of Oedipus
Or, better still, where is the King himself?

CHORAGOS. It is this very place, stranger; he is inside.
This is his wife and mother of his children.

MESSENGER. I wish her happiness in a happy house,
Blest in all the fulfillment of her marriage.

IOKASTE. I wish as much for you: your courtesy
Deserves a like good fortune. But now, tell me:
Why have you come? What have you to say to us?

MESSENGER. Good news, my lady, for your house and your husband.

IOKASTE. What news? Who sent you here?

MESSENGER. I am from Corinth.

The news I bring ought to mean joy for you,
Though it may be you will find some grief in it.

IOKASTE. What is it? How can it touch us in both ways?

MESSENGER. The word is that the people of the Isthmus³²
Intend to call Oedipus to be their king.

IOKASTE. But old King Polybos—is he not reigning still?

MESSENGER. No. Death holds him in his sepulchre.

IOKASTE. What are you saying? Polybos is dead?

MESSENGER. If I am not telling the truth, may I die myself.

IOKASTE [*to a MAIDSERVANT*]. Go in, go quickly; tell this to your master.

³¹ Apollo was thought to have been born at Lycéa.

³² Corinth was an isthmus.

O riddlers of God's will, where are you now!
This was the man whom Oedipus, long ago,
Feared so, fled so, in dread of destroying him—
But it was another fate by which he died. [*Enter OEDIPUS, center*]

OEDIPUS. Dearest Iokastê, why have you sent for me?

IOKASTE. Listen to what this man says, and then tell me
What has become of the solemn prophecies.

OEDIPUS. Who is this man? What is his news for me?

IOKASTE. He has come from Corinth to announce your father's death!

OEDIPUS. Is it true, stranger? Tell me in your own words.

MESSANGER. I can not say it more clearly: the King is dead.

OEDIPUS. Was it by treason? Or by an attack of illness?

MESSANGER. A little thing brings old men to their rest.

OEDIPUS. It was sickness, then?

MESSANGER. Yes, and his many years.

OEDIPUS. Ah!

Why should a man respect the Pythian hearth,³³ or
Give heed to the birds that jangle above his head?

They prophesied that I should kill Polybos,
Kill my own father; but he is dead and buried,
And I am here—I never touched him, never,
Unless he died of grief for my departure,
And thus, in a sense, through me. No. Polybos
Has packed the oracles off with him underground.
They are empty words.

IOKASTE. Had I not told you so?

OEDIPUS. You had; it was my faint heart that betrayed me.

IOKASTE. From now on never think of those things again.

OEDIPUS. And yet—must I not fear my mother's bed?

IOKASTE. Why should anyone in this world be afraid,
Since Fate rules us and nothing can be foreseen?
A man should live only for the present day.

Have no more fear of sleeping with your mother:
How many men, in dreams, have lain with their mothers!
No reasonable man is troubled by such things.

OEDIPUS. That is true; only—

If only my mother were not still alive!
But she is alive. I can not help my dread.

IOKASTE. Yet this news of your father's death is wonderful.

OEDIPUS. Wonderful. But I fear the living woman.

MESSANGER. Tell me, who is this woman that you fear?

OEDIPUS. It is Meropê, man; the wife of King Polybos.

MESSANGER. Meropê? Why should you be afraid of her?

OEDIPUS. An oracle of the gods, a dreadful saying.

MESSANGER. Can you tell me about it or are you sworn to silence?

OEDIPUS. I can tell you, and I will.

Apollo said through his prophet that I was the man

³³ Delphi, where Apollo's medium was the Pythia.

Who should marry his own mother, shed his father's blood
With his own hands. And so, for all these years
I have kept clear of Corinth, and no harm has come—
Though it would have been sweet to see my parents again.

MESSENGER. And is this the fear that drove you out of Corinth?

OEDIPUS. Would you have me kill my father?

MESSENGER. As for that

You must be reassured by the news I gave you.

OEDIPUS. If you could reassure me, I would reward you.

MESSENGER. I had that in mind, I will confess: I thought

I could count on you when you returned to Corinth.

OEDIPUS. No: I will never go near my parents again.

MESSENGER. Ah, son, you still do not know what you are doing—

OEDIPUS. What do you mean? In the name of God tell me!

MESSENGER. —If these are your reasons for not going home.

OEDIPUS. I tell you, I fear the oracle may come true.

MESSENGER. And guilt may come upon you through your parents?

OEDIPUS. That is the dread that is always in my heart.

MESSENGER. Can you not see that all your fears are groundless?

OEDIPUS. Groundless? Am I not my parents' son?

MESSENGER. Polybos was not your father.

OEDIPUS. Not my father?

MESSENGER. No more your father than the man speaking to you.

OEDIPUS. But you are nothing to me!

MESSENGER. Neither was he.

OEDIPUS. Then why did he call me son?

MESSENGER. I will tell you:

Long ago he had you from my hands, as a gift.

OEDIPUS. Then how could he love me so, if I was not his?

MESSENGER. He had no children, and his heart turned to you.

OEDIPUS. What of you? Did you buy me? Did you find me by chance?

MESSENGER. I came upon you in the woody vales of Kithairon.

OEDIPUS. And what were you doing there?

MESSENGER. Tending my flocks.

OEDIPUS. A wandering shepherd?

MESSENGER. But your savior, son, that day.

OEDIPUS. From what did you save me?

MESSENGER. Your ankles should tell you that.

OEDIPUS. Ah, stranger, why do you speak of that childhood pain?

MESSENGER. I pulled the skewer that pinned your feet together.

OEDIPUS. I have had the mark as long as I can remember.

MESSENGER. That was why you were given the name you bear.³⁴

OEDIPUS. God! Was it my father or my mother who did it?

Tell me!

MESSENGER. I do not know. The man who gave you to me

Can tell you better than I.

OEDIPUS. It was not you that found me, but another?

³⁴ *Oedipus* means "swell-foot."

MESSENGER. It was another shepherd gave you to me.

OEDIPUS. Who was he? Can you tell me who he was?

MESSENGER. I think he was said to be one of Laios' people.

OEDIPUS. You mean the Laios who was king here years ago?

MESSENGER. Yes; King Laios; and the man was one of his herdsmen.

OEDIPUS. Is he still alive? Can I see him?

MESSENGER. These men here

Know best about such things.

OEDIPUS. Does anyone here

Know this shepherd that he is talking about?

Have you seen him in the fields, or in the town?

If you have, tell me. It is time things were made plain.

CHORAGOS. I think the man he means is that same shepherd

You have already asked to see. Iokastê perhaps

Could tell you something.

OEDIPUS. Do you know anything

About him, Lady? Is he the man we have summoned?

Is that the man this shepherd means?

IOKASTE. Why think of him?

Forget this herdsman. Forget it all.

This talk is a waste of time.

OEDIPUS. How can you say that,

When the clues to my true birth are in my hands?

IOKASTE. For God's love, let us have no more questioning!

Is your life nothing to you?

My own is pain enough for me to bear.

OEDIPUS. You need not worry. Suppose my mother a slave,

And born of slaves: no baseness can touch you.

IOKASTE. Listen to me, I beg you: do not do this thing!

OEDIPUS. I will not listen; the truth must be made known.

IOKASTE. Everything that I say is for your own good!

OEDIPUS. My own good,

Snaps my patience, then; I want none of it.

IOKASTE. You are fatally wrong! May you never learn who you are!

OEDIPUS. Go, one of you, and bring the shepherd here.

Let us leave this woman to brag of her royal name.

IOKASTE. Ah, miserable!

That is the only word I have for you now.

That is the only word I can ever have. [*Exit into the palace.*]

CHORAGOS. Why has she left us, Oedipus? Why has she gone

In such a passion of sorrow? I fear this silence:

Something dreadful may come of it.

OEDIPUS. Let it come!

However base my birth, I must know about it.

The Queen, like a woman, is perhaps ashamed

To think of my low origin. But I

Am a child of Luck; I can not be dishonored.

Luck is my mother; the passing months, my brothers,

Have seen me rich and poor.

If this is so,
How could I wish that I were someone else?
How could I not be glad to know my birth?

ODE III

CHORUS. If ever the coming time were known
To my heart's pondering,
Kithairon, now by Heaven I see the torches
At the festival of the next full moon,³⁵
And see the dance, and hear the choir sing
A grace to your gentle shade:
Mountain where Oedipus was found,
O mountain guard of a noble race!
May the god who heals us³⁶ lend his aid,
And let that glory come to pass
For our king's cradling-ground.

[STROPHE]

Of the nymphs that flower beyond the years,³⁷
Who bore you, royal child,
To Pan of the hills³⁸ or the timberline Apollo,³⁹
Cold in delight where the upland clears,
Or Hermès for whom Kyllenê's heights are piled?⁴⁰
Or flushed as evening cloud,
Great Dionysos, roamer of mountains,⁴¹
He—was it he who found you there,
And caught you up in his own proud
Arms from the sweet god-ravisher⁴²
Who laughed by the Muses' fountains?

[ANTISTROPHE]

SCENE IV

OEDIPUS. Sirs: though I do not know the man,
I think I see him coming, this shepherd we want:
He is old, like our friend here, and the men

³⁵ Almost every god who was at all important had a festival day, most of which were celebrated at the full moon.

³⁶ Apollo.

³⁷ Immortal nymphs; the Chorus is attempting to attribute immortality to Oedipus.

³⁸ Pan was god of pastures, forests, flocks, and herds.

³⁹ Apollo was also associated with the care of flocks and herds.

⁴⁰ Hermès, the messenger of the gods and also a god of flocks, roads, trading, etc., was born on Mt. Kyllenê.

⁴¹ Dionysos, the god of wine (hence "flushed") and also of vegetation, was honored in ceremonies on Mt. Parnassos.

⁴² The nymph who is conjectured to have borne Oedipus.

Bringing him seem to be servants of my house.
But you can tell, if you have ever seen him.

[Enter SHEPHERD escorted by servants.]

CHORAGOS. I know him, he was Laios' man. You can trust him.

OEDIPUS. Tell me first, you from Corinth: is this the shepherd
We were discussing?

MESSENGER. This is the very man.

OEDIPUS [to SHEPHERD]. Come here. No, look at me. You must answer
Everything I ask.—You belonged to Laios?

SHEPHERD. Yes: born his slave, brought up in his house.

OEDIPUS. Tell me: what kind of work did you do for him?

SHEPHERD. I was a shepherd of his, most of my life.

OEDIPUS. Where mainly did you go for pasturage?

SHEPHERD. Sometimes Kithairon, sometimes the hills near-by.

OEDIPUS. Do you remember ever seeing this man out there?

SHEPHERD. What would he be doing there? This man?

OEDIPUS. This man standing here. Have you ever seen him before?

SHEPHERD. No. At least, not to my recollection.

MESSENGER. And that is not strange, my lord. But I'll refresh
His memory: he must remember when we two
Spent three whole seasons together, March to September,
On Kithairon or thereabouts. He had two flocks;
I had one. Each autumn I'd drive mine home
And he would go back with his to Laios' sheepfold.—
Is this not true, just as I have described it?

SHEPHERD. True, yes; but it was all so long ago.

MESSENGER. Well, then: do you remember, back in those days,
That you gave me a baby boy to bring up as my own?

SHEPHERD. What if I did? What are you trying to say?

MESSENGER. King Oedipus was once that little child.

SHEPHERD. Damn you, hold your tongue!

OEDIPUS. No more of that!

It is your tongue needs watching, not this man's.

SHEPHERD. My King, my Master, what is it I have done wrong?

OEDIPUS. You have not answered his question about the boy.

SHEPHERD. He does not know . . . He is only making trouble . . .

OEDIPUS. Come, speak plainly, or it will go hard with you.

SHEPHERD. In God's name, do not torture an old man!

OEDIPUS. Come here, one of you; bind his arms behind him.

SHEPHERD. Unhappy king! What more do you wish to learn?

OEDIPUS. Did you give this man the child he speaks of?

SHEPHERD. I did.

And I would to God I had died that very day.

OEDIPUS. You will die now unless you speak the truth.

SHEPHERD. Yet if I speak the truth, I am worse than dead.

OEDIPUS [to ATTENDANT]. He intends to draw it out, apparently—

SHEPHERD. No! I have told you already that I gave him the boy.

OEDIPUS. Where did you get him? From your house? From somewhere
else?

SHEPHERD. Not from mine, no. A man gave him to me.

OEDIPUS. Is that man here? Whose house did he belong to?

SHEPHERD. For God's love, my King, do not ask me any more!

OEDIPUS. You are a dead man if I have to ask you again.

SHEPHERD. Then . . . Then the child was from the palace of Laïos.

OEDIPUS. A slave child? or a child of his own line?

SHEPHERD. Ah, I am on the brink of dreadful speech!

OEDIPUS. And I of dreadful hearing. Yet I must hear.

SHEPHERD. If you must be told, then . . .

They said it was Laïos' child;

But it is your wife who can tell you about that.

OEDIPUS. My wife!—Did she give it to you?

SHEPHERD. My lord, she did.

OEDIPUS. Do you know why?

SHEPHERD. I was told to get rid of it.

OEDIPUS. Oh heartless mother!

SHEPHERD. But in dread of prophecies . . .

OEDIPUS. Tell me.

SHEPHERD. It was said that the boy would kill his own father.

OEDIPUS. Then why did you give him over to this old man?

SHEPHERD. I pitied the baby, my King,

And I thought that this man would take him far away

To his own country.

He saved him—but for what a fate!

For if you are what this man says you are,

No man living is more wretched than Oedipus.

OEDIPUS. Ah God!

It was true!

All the prophecies!

—Now,

O Light, may I look on you for the last time!

I, Oedipus,

Oedipus, damned in his birth, in his marriage damned,

Damned in the blood he shed with his own hand!

[*He rushes into the palace.*]

ODE IV

CHORUS. Alas for the seed of men.

[STROPHE I]

What measure shall I give these generations
That breathe on the void and are void
And exist and do not exist?

Who bears more weight of joy
Than mass of sunlight shifting in images,
Or who shall make his thought stay on
That down time drifts away?

Your splendor is all fallen.

O naked brow of wrath and tears,
O change of Oedipus!
I who saw your days call no man blest—
Your great days like ghosts gone.

That mind was a strong bow.

[ANTISTROPHE 1]

Deep, how deep you drew it then, hard archer,
At a dim fearful range,

And brought dear glory down!

You overcame the stranger—
The virgin with her hooking lion claws—⁴³
And though death sang, stood like a tower
To make pale Thebes take heart.

Fortress against our sorrow!

True king, giver of laws,
Majestic Oedipus!
No prince in Thebes had ever such renown,
No prince won such grace of power.

And now of all men ever known
Most pitiful is this man's story:
His fortunes are most changed, his state
Fallen to a low slave's
Ground under bitter fate.

[STROPHE 2]

O Oedipus, most royal one!
The great door that expelled you to the light⁴⁴
Gave at night—ah, gave night to your glory:
As to the father, to the fathering son.

All understood too late.

How could that queen whom Laios won,
The garden that he harrowed at his height,⁴⁵
Be silent when that act was done?

But all eyes fail before time's eye,
All actions come to justice there.
Though never willed, though far down the deep past,
Your bed, your dread sirings,
Are brought to book at last.⁴⁶

[ANTISTROPHE 2]

⁴³ The Sphinx, who had the face of a woman, the body of a lion, and the wings of a bird.

⁴⁴ Iokaste's womb.

⁴⁵ Another reference to Iokaste's womb and, by implication, to Iokaste herself.

⁴⁶ An allusion to the fates of Oedipus' children ("dread sirings"). His sons, Polyneikês and Etioklês, killed each other in battle, and his daughter Antigônê died tragically; the circumstances of her death are related in another of Sophocles' plays. A second daughter, Ismenê, seems never to have attained any significance.

Child by Laios doomed to die,
Then doomed to lose that fortunate little death,
Would God you never took breath in this air
That with my wailing lips I take to cry:

For I weep the world's outcast.

I was blind, and now I can tell why:
Asleep, for you had given ease of breath
To Thebes, while the false years went by.

EXODOS

Enter, from the palace, SECOND MESSENGER.

SECOND MESSENGER. Elders of Thebes,⁴⁷ most honored in this land,
What horrors are yours to see and hear, what weight
Of sorrow to be endured, if, true to your birth,
You venerate the line of Labdakos!
I think neither Istros nor Phasis, those great rivers,
Could purify this place of all the evil
It shelters now, or soon must bring to light—
Evil not done unconsciously, but willed.

The greatest griefs are those we cause ourselves.

CHORAGOS. Surely, friend, we have grief enough already;
What new sorrow do you mean?

SECOND MESSENGER. The Queen is dead.

CHORAGOS. O miserable Queen! But at whose hand?

SECOND MESSENGER.

Her own.

The full horror of what happened you can not know,
For you did not see it; but I, who did, will tell you
As clearly as I can how she met her death.

When she had left us,
In passionate silence, passing through the court,
She ran to her apartment in the house,
Her hair clutched by the fingers of both hands.
She closed the doors behind her; then, by that bed
Where long ago the fatal son was conceived—
That son who should bring about his father's death—
We heard her call upon Laios, dead so many years,
And heard her wail for the double fruit of her marriage,
A husband by her husband, children by her child.

Exactly how she died I do not know:
For Oedipus burst in moaning and would not let us
Keep vigil to the end: it was by him
As he stormed about the room that our eyes were caught.

⁴⁷ The Chorus.

From one to another of us he went, begging a sword,
Hunting the wife who was not his wife, the mother
Whose womb had carried his own children and himself.
I do not know: it was none of us aided him,
But surely one of the gods was in control!
For with a dreadful cry
He hurled his weight, as though wrenched out of himself,
At the twin doors: the bolts gave, and he rushed in.
And there we saw her hanging, her body swaying
From the cruel cord she had noosed about her neck.
A great sob broke from him, heartbreaking to hear,
As he loosed the rope and lowered her to the ground.

I would blot out from my mind what happened next!
For the King ripped from her gown the golden brooches
That were her ornament, and raised them, and plunged them down
Straight into his own eyeballs, crying, 'No more,
No more shall you look on the misery about me,
The horrors of my own doing! Too long you have known
The faces of those whom I should never have seen,
Too long been blind to those for whom I was searching!
From this hour, go in darkness!' And as he spoke,
He struck at his eyes—not once, but many times;
And the blood spattered his beard,
Bursting from his ruined sockets like red hail.

So from the unhappiness of two this evil has sprung,
A curse on the man and woman alike. The old
Happiness of the house of Labdakos
Was happiness enough: where is it today?
It is all wailing and ruin, disgrace, death—all
The misery of mankind that has a name—
And it is wholly and for ever theirs.

CHORAGOS. Is he in agony still? Is there no rest for him?

SECOND MESSENGER. He is calling for someone to open the doors wide
So that all the children of Kadmos may look upon
His father's murderer, his mother's—no,
I can not say it!

And then he will leave Thebes,
Self-exiled, in order that the curse
Which he himself pronounced may depart from the house.
He is weak, and there is none to lead him,
So terrible is his suffering.

But you will see:

Look, the doors are opening; in a moment
You will see a thing that would crush a heart of stone.

[*The central door is opened; OEDIPUS, blinded, is led in.*]

CHORAGOS. Dreadful indeed for men to see.
Never have my own eyes
Looked on a sight so full of fear.

Oedipus!
What madness came upon you, what daemon
Leaped on your life with heavier
Punishment than a mortal man can bear?
No: I can not even
Look at you, poor ruined one.
And I would speak, question, ponder,
If I were able. No.
You make me shudder.

OEDIPUS. God. God.

Is there a sorrow greater?
Where shall I find harbor in this world?
My voice is hurled far on a dark wind.
What has God done to me?

CHORAGOS. Too terrible to think of, or to see.

OEDIPUS. O cloud of night,
Never to be turned away: night coming on,
I can not tell how: night like a shroud!

[STROPHE 1]

My fair winds brought me here.
O God. Again
The pain of the spikes where I had sight,
The flooding pain
Of memory, never to be gouged out.

CHORAGOS. This is not strange.
You suffer it all twice over, remorse in pain,
Pain in remorse.

OEDIPUS. Ah dear friend
Are you faithful even yet, you alone?
Are you still standing near me, will you stay here,
Patient, to care for the blind?

[ANTISTROPHE 1]

The blind man!
Yet even blind I know who it is attends me,
By the voice's tone—
Though my new darkness hide the comforter.

CHORAGOS. Oh fearful act!
What god was it drove you to rake black
Night across your eyes?

OEDIPUS. Apollo. Apollo. Dear
Children, the god was Apollo.
He brought my sick, sick fate upon me.
But the blinding hand was my own!
How could I bear to see
When all my sight was horror everywhere?

[STROPHE 2]

CHORAGOS. Everywhere; that is true.

OEDIPUS. And now what is left?

Images? Love? A greeting even,
Sweet to the senses? Is there anything?
Ah, no, friends: lead me away.
Lead me away from Thebes.

Lead the great wreck
And hell of Oedipus, whom the gods hate.

CHORAGOS. Your misery, you are not blind to that.
Would God you had never found it out!

OEDIPUS. Death take the man who unbound
My feet on that hillside
And delivered me from death to life! What life?
If only I had died,
This weight of monstrous doom
Could not have dragged me and my darlings down.

[ANTISTROPHE 2]

CHORAGOS. I would have wished the same.

OEDIPUS. Oh never to have come here
With my father's blood upon me! Never
To have been the man they call his mother's husband!
Oh accurst! Oh child of evil,
To have entered that wretched bed—

the selfsame one!

More primal than sin itself, this fell to me.

CHORAGOS. I do not know what words to offer you.
You were better dead than alive and blind.

OEDIPUS. Do not counsel me any more. This punishment
That I have laid upon myself is just.

If I had eyes,
I do not know how I could bear the sight
Of my father, when I came to the house of Death,
Or my mother: for I have sinned against them both
So vilely that I could not make my peace
By strangling my own life.

Or do you think my children,
Born as they were born, would be sweet to my eyes?
Ah never, never! Nor this town with its high walls,
Nor the holy images of the gods.

For I,

Thrice miserable!—Oedipus, noblest of all the line
Of Kadmos, have condemned myself to enjoy
These things no more, by my own malediction
Expelling that man whom the gods declared
To be a defilement in the house of Laios.
After exposing the rankness of my own guilt,
How could I look men frankly in the eyes?
No, I swear it,

If I could have stifled my hearing at its source,
I would have done it and made all this body
A tight cell of misery, blank to light and sound:
So I should have been safe in my dark mind
Beyond external evil.

Ah Kithairon!

Why did you shelter me? When I was cast upon you,
Why did I not die? Then I should never
Have shown the world my execrable birth.

Ah Polybos! Corinth, city that I believed
The ancient seat of my ancestors: how fair
I seemed, your child! And all the while this evil
Was cancerous within me!

For I am sick

In my own being, sick in my origin.

O three roads, dark ravine, woodland and way
Where three roads met: you, drinking my father's blood,
My own blood, spilled by my own hand: can you remember
The unspeakable things I did there, and the things
I went on from there to do?

O marriage, marriage!

The act that engendered me, and again the act
Performed by the son in the same bed—

Ah, the net

Of incest, mingling fathers, brothers, sons,
With brides, wives, mothers: the last evil
That can be known by men: no tongue can say
How evil!

No. For the love of God, conceal me
Somewhere far from Thebes; or kill me; or hurl me
Into the sea, away from men's eyes for ever.

Come, lead me. You need not fear to touch me.

Of all men, I alone can bear this guilt. [*Enter KREON.*]

CHORAGOS. Kreon is here now. As to what you ask,
He may decide the course to take. He only
Is left to protect the city in your place.

OEDIPUS. Alas, how can I speak to him? What right have I
To beg his courtesy whom I have deeply wronged?

KREON.⁴⁸ I have not come to mock you, Oedipus,
Or to reproach you, either.

[*To ATTENDANTS.*] —You, standing there:

If you have lost all respect for man's dignity,

At least respect the flame of Lord Helios:

Do not allow this pollution to show itself

Openly here, an affront to the earth

⁴⁸ Kreon acts as Regent of Thebes because Oedipus' sons are too young to rule.

And Heaven's rain and the light of day. No, take him
Into the house as quickly as you can.

For it is proper

That only the close kindred see his grief.

OEDIPUS. I pray you in God's name, since your courtesy
Ignores my dark expectation, visiting
With mercy this man of all men most execrable:
Give me what I ask—for your good, not for mine.

KREON. And what is it that you turn to me begging for?

OEDIPUS. Drive me out of this country as quickly as may be
To a place where no human voice can ever greet me.

KREON. I should have done that before now—only,
God's will had not been wholly revealed to me.

OEDIPUS. But his command is plain: the parricide
Must be destroyed. I am that evil man.

KREON. That is the sense of it, yes; but as things are,
We had best discover clearly what is to be done.

OEDIPUS. You would learn more about a man like me?

KREON. You are ready now to listen to the god.

OEDIPUS. I will listen. But it is to you
That I must turn for help. I beg you, hear me.

The woman in there—

Give her whatever funeral you think proper:
She is your sister.

—But let me go, Kreon!

Let me purge my father's Thebes of the pollution
Of my living here, and go out to the wild hills,
To Kithairon, that has won such fame with me,
The tomb my mother and father appointed for me,
And let me die there, as they willed I should.

And yet I know

Death will not ever come to me through sickness
Or in any natural way: I have been preserved
For some unthinkable fate. But let that be.

As for my sons, you need not care for them.

They are men, they will find some way to live.

But my poor daughters, who have shared my table,
Who never before have been parted from their father—
Take care of them, Kreon; do this for me.

And will you let me touch them with my hands

A last time, and let us weep together?

Be kind, my lord,

Great prince, be kind!

Could I but touch them,
They would be mine again, as when I had my eyes.

[*Enter ANTIGONE and ISMENE, attended.*]

Ah, God!

Is it my dearest children I hear weeping?

Has Kreon pitied me and sent my daughters?

KREON. Yes, Oedipus: I knew that they were dear to you
In the old days, and know you must love them still.

OEDIPUS. May God bless you for this—and be a friendlier
Guardian to you than he has been to me!

Children, where are you?

Come quickly to my hands: they are your brother's—
Hands that have brought your father's once clear eyes
To this way of seeing—

Ah dearest ones,

I had neither sight nor knowledge then, your father
By the woman who was the source of his own life!
And I weep for you—having no strength to see you—,
I weep for you when I think of the bitterness
That men will visit upon you all your lives.
What homes, what festivals can you attend
Without being forced to depart again in tears?
And when you come to marriageable age,
Where is the man, my daughters, who would dare
Risk the bane that lies on all my children?
Is there any evil wanting? Your father killed
His father; sowed the womb of her who bore him;
Engendered you at the fount of his own existence!

That is what they will say of you.

Then, whom

Can you ever marry? There are no bridegrooms for you,
And your lives must wither away in sterile dreaming.

O Kreon, son of Menoikeus!

You are the only father my daughters have,
Since we, their parents, are both of us gone for ever.
They are your own blood: you will not let them
Fall into beggary and loneliness;
You will keep them from the miseries that are mine!
Take pity on them; see, they are only children,
Friendless except for you. Promise me this,
Great Prince, and give me your hand in token of it.

[KREON clasps his right hand.]

Children:

I could say much, if you could understand me,
But as it is, I have only this prayer for you:
Live where you can, be as happy as you can—
Happier, please God, than God has made your father.

KREON. Enough. You have wept enough. Now go within.

OEDIPUS. I must; but it is hard.

KREON. Time eases all things.

OEDIPUS. You know my mind, then?

KREON. Say what you desire.
 OEDIPUS. Send me from Thebes!
 KREON. God grant that I may!⁴⁹
 OEDIPUS. But since God hates me . . .
 KREON. No, he will grant your wish.
 OEDIPUS. You promise?
 KREON. I can not speak beyond my knowledge.
 OEDIPUS. Then lead me in.
 KREON. Come now, and leave your children.
 OEDIPUS. No! Do not take them from me!
 KREON. Think no longer

That you are in command here, but rather think
 How, when you were, you served your own destruction.

[*Exeunt into the house all but the CHORUS; the
 CHORAGOS chants directly to the audience.*]

CHORAGOS. Men of Thebes: look upon Oedipus.

This is the king who solved the famous riddle
 And towered up, most powerful of men.
 No mortal eyes but looked on him with envy,
 Yet in the end ruin swept over him.

Let every man in mankind's frailty
 Consider his last day; and let none
 Presume on his good fortune until he find
 Life, at his death, a memory without pain.

COMMENTARY

The plot of *Oedipus Rex* is at once the most ingenious and the most terrible that has ever been conceived. It can be thought of as a detective story in which the detective, secure in his own virtue and in the consciousness that he is doing his duty, undertakes to discover the identity of the person who has committed a crime of great seriousness and is forced by the evidence he turns up to recognize that the criminal is none other than himself. And more than this is in store for him. As he pursues his investigations further, he learns that the criminal act, because it was he who committed it, is immeasurably worse than at first it had seemed.

Summarized even in this abstract way, the story of Oedipus is calculated to disturb us in our deepest and most private emotions, for most of us live with the sense of a guilty secret, although what the secret is about we do not know. And of course the play haunts and disturbs us the more because of the peculiar heinousness of what Oedipus has done. He has committed not merely terrible crimes but terrible sins, violating not only the law of society but of the gods. And even the idea of sin does not comprehend the horror of a man's having killed his father and married his mother. These acts are, as we say, unthinkable; the human mind can do nothing with them.

⁴⁹ Kreon refuses to act until he knows the will of the gods in this matter.

Our disturbance is not lessened but increased by the consideration that Oedipus did not commit his awful acts by intention. Of all the circumstances of the hero's fate, this is the one that most teases, baffles, and terrifies. It is reasonable to say—it has been said—that Oedipus is not accountable for what he did, that he had not really incurred guilt in killing his father and marrying his mother because he had not meant to do these things; on the contrary, once he had heard the awful prophecy, he had bent all his effort toward not doing them. This exculpation of Oedipus is based upon Aristotle's doctrine, set forth in his *Ethics*, to which assent is given by law and morality throughout the Western world, that for an act to have ethical significance, for good or bad, the person who commits it must have done so with consciousness and will. It is in these terms that Oedipus argues for his blamelessness in *Oedipus at Colonus*, the play that Sophocles wrote thirty years later. Worn out with suffering and on the point of death, the aged Oedipus, in a moment of bitterness and self-pity, says that he should not have been adjudged guilty because he had had no intention of wrong-doing. But in *Oedipus Rex* he makes no such claim to innocence. He does not justify himself; his mind is wholly given over to horror and self-loathing. We feel this response to be appropriate. The rationality of Aristotle's doctrine of intention seems quite inapplicable to the emotion evoked by Oedipus' situation, which occurs at a depth to which reason cannot penetrate. It is from the disclosure of this primitive depth that the play derives its terrible power, leading us to recognize that a man may incur guilt, and of an ultimate kind, even though a rational ethic might pronounce him innocent; we are brought to confront the possibility that reason can be superseded by darker modes of judgment. The security that a rational ethic had seemed to afford is taken from us.

An engaging question often raised about *Oedipus Rex* is whether or not it is a tragedy of fate. Much ingenuity has been expended to show that it is not. Some critics feel that the play becomes less interesting and impressive if it is taken as a tragedy of fate, for the protagonist then lacks the dignity that we associate with the possession of free will; he becomes, as we say, a puppet in the hands of destiny. Those who hold this position believe that they have an ally in Aristotle, who, in his *Poetics*, says that the protagonist of a tragedy should be a man worthy of respect and admiration but having some discernible weakness or fault of character to which his tragic disaster may be attributed. In some important sense, that is, he is to be thought responsible for what befalls him.

Aristotle's prescription would certainly seem to be satisfied by the character of Oedipus. He is admirable for many qualities. He is wise and courageous; it was he who, when everyone else stood helpless before the Sphinx that ravaged Thebes, answered her riddle and destroyed her, thus freeing the land of which he then became the ruler. As a king he is virtuous and conscientious. To be sure, he is called *tyrannos*, which, although it is not to be translated as "tyrant," means a king who rules by his own power, as distinguished from *basileus*, a king by legal right. Yet he is in no way arbitrary or repressive; he admits his wife to equal rule with him and allows her brother Kreon to stand almost on a parity with the royal couple. As husband and father he is dutiful and loving. He is not lacking in piety; although he speaks contemptuously to the great seer Teiresias, the protégé of Apollo, he holds the gods in due awe and is quick to undertake what Apollo's oracle at Delphi tells him should be done to rid the city of plague.

One fault, however, Oedipus does have, that of pride, and he is quick to anger when his pride is offended. His slaying of his unknown father Laios at the crossroads had been the outcome of this trait. And it is his choleric pride, amounting to arrogance, that prevents him from heeding any word of caution when he is pursuing his search for the killer of Laios, with the result that he is forced to confront the truth that he himself is the killer—and, of course, something more than that.

Yet no matter how fully we take account of Oedipus's fault of character, we have no ground for saying that the tragic disaster is brought about by this personal flaw and not by the predestination announced in the prophecy. That the fault detonates the disaster is of course true, but the explosives have been laid by what, in the nature of the prophecy about Oedipus, we can only call fate. The young hero's hot-blooded response to Laios' insult and show of violence did indeed lead him to kill *a man*, and, what is worse, a king; but it was the fated ignorance of his parenthood and the unsought but destined occasion of the meeting between father and son that led him to kill *his father*. Any other proud and hot-blooded man who had done what Oedipus did would have committed an act that was to be deplored and condemned: for Oedipus alone the act was immitigable, and the more so because it led to an act yet more horrifying, his marriage to his mother.

If we take the line that Oedipus brought about his tragedy by refusing to heed the advice to be cautious in his search for Laios' killer, we find ourselves in the position of supposing that all would have been well if he had prudently given up his investigation and settled to live in contented ignorance with his wife and children in plague-ridden Thebes. Of course we can suppose no such thing. Nor would we have any satisfaction if any such thing came about. To be sure, we are impelled to cry out a warning to the impetuous man not to call upon *that* witness, not to ask *that* question, we are fearful of the moment when the full dreadful knowledge will come to him of who he is and what he has done. But we do not want Oedipus to remain oblivious of the truth about himself. An Oedipus who prudently gave up his search would be an object of condescension, even of contempt: the Oedipus who presses on to the conclusion that destroys him compels our awed respect.

In short, then, whatever it may also be, the story of Oedipus must certainly be called a tragedy of fate. Yet to say this is, after all, not to say much. Something of what must be added if we are to account for the peculiar power of *Oedipus Rex* is suggested by a comparison of the story of the play with a well-known tale of similar purport. In the city of Ispahan, in Persia, a certain man's servant came to him and said, "I was in the market place and there I saw Death and he made a threatening gesture to me." The man said, "Let us flee," and he and his servant set out posthaste for Samarra. No sooner had they entered that city than they encountered Death, to whom the man said, "Why did you threaten my servant in the market place in Ispahan?" Death replied, "My gesture was not one of threat but of surprise, for I had an appointment to meet you in Samarra, and I was surprised to learn, from seeing your servant, that you were still in Ispahan." In its barest outline, the story of Oedipus is no different from this—a man, fleeing his fate, encounters it. But the wry little parable of fatalism evokes no other response than an ironic shrug; the mind does not engage it, there is really nothing in the tale for the mind to

engage. The implied generalization, that all men must submit to what is ordained for them, that some fulfil their fate by the very intention of evading it, may win from us a certain assent but not much interest. We respond very differently when a man such as Oedipus fulfils his fate by seeking to evade it—a man whose pride, courage, and intellect suggest an ideal of mankind, and whose particular destiny it is to experience on so great a scale the peculiarly human pain of remorse and self-reproach. The man who flees from Ispahan to Samarra is indeed without dignity, a mere puppet in the hands of destiny; the joke is on him, fate has made a fool of him. But Oedipus, who is unable to save himself by intelligence and right intention and who is subject to an order of things which does not proceed by human rules and is not susceptible to human understanding, is enhanced in stature by his doom.

Aristotle's *Poetics* is chiefly devoted to a discussion of tragedy, and it is obvious that among all the Athenian achievements in this genre the author gives his highest admiration to *Oedipus Rex*. One cannot resist the speculation that he held the play in especial regard because it so deeply challenges and so successfully baffles the rational intellect, of which he was the great exemplar, and that he loved this play because it proposed the existence of forces inscrutable to human reason. If his spirit was as large as his mind, he may well have found pleasure in contemplating an order that did not yield its secrets to the demands of rational intellect.

Oedipus at Colonus, the play that Sophocles wrote in the year of his death at the age of ninety, also speaks of an order that baffles reason. Oedipus is now very old; he has been wandering the earth, an outcast, attended only by his two daughters. Although he is feeble and foredone, his quickness to anger has not diminished, and now his rage is directed toward his two sons because they have permitted him to continue in the exile to which he had doomed himself. He is bitter at his fate and he insists on his blamelessness—he is not, it is plain, an endearing person. Yet word has gone out that the city will be blessed which gives this accursed outcast his last resting place and buries him with honor. And when death comes to him at Colonus, a suburb of Athens, it is not death as ordinary men know it, but apotheosis: by divine agency he is carried off from earth to live as a demigod. This end is not granted Oedipus in compensation for his suffering but in recognition of some power of his nature that approaches the divine. We are left to ponder how it is that this cursed man became a blessing and why this guilty man should have been so supremely rewarded.

The Tragedy of KING LEAR

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

1564-1616

CHARACTERS

LEAR, *King of Britain*

KING OF FRANCE

DUKE OF BURGUNDY

DUKE OF CORNWALL

DUKE OF ALBANY

EARL OF KENT

EARL OF GLOUCESTER

EDGAR, *son to GLOUCESTER*

EDMUND, *bastard son to*

GLOUCESTER

CURAN, *a courtier*

OLD MAN, *tenant to GLOUCESTER*

DOCTOR

FOOL

OSWALD, *steward to GONERIL*

A CAPTAIN *employed by EDMUND*

GENTLEMAN *attendant on CORDELIA*

A HERALD

SERVANTS *to CORNWALL*

GONERIL

REGAN

CORDELIA

} *daughters to LEAR*

Knights of Lear's Train, Captains, Messengers, Soldiers,
and Attendants

SCENE: *Britain.*

King Lear's palace.

[*Enter KENT, GLOUCESTER, and EDMUND.*]

KENT. I thought the King had more affected¹ the Duke of Albany than Cornwall.

GLOUCESTER. It did always seem so to us; but now, in the division of the kingdom, it appears not which of the Dukes he values most; for equalities² are so weigh'd,³ that curiosity⁴ in neither can make choice of⁵ either's moiety.⁶

KENT. Is not this your son, my lord?

GLOUCESTER. His breeding, sir, hath been at my charge. I have so often blushed to acknowledge him, that now I am brazed⁷ to 't.

KENT. I cannot conceive⁸ you.

GLOUCESTER. Sir, this young fellow's mother could; whereupon she grew round-wombed, and had, indeed, sir, a son for her cradle ere she had a husband for her bed. Do you smell a fault?

KENT. I cannot wish the fault undone, the issue of it being so proper.

GLOUCESTER. But I have a son, sir, by order of law, some year older than this, who yet is no dearer in my account. Though this knave came something saucily into the world before he was sent for, yet was his mother fair; there was good sport at his making, and the whoreson⁹ must be acknowledged. Do you know this noble gentleman, Edmund?

EDMUND. No, my lord.

GLOUCESTER. My Lord of Kent. Remember him hereafter as my honourable friend.

EDMUND. My services to your lordship.

KENT. I must love you, and sue to know you better.

EDMUND. Sir, I shall study deserving.

GLOUCESTER. He hath been out nine years, and away he shall again. The King is coming.

[*Sennet.*¹⁰ *Enter one bearing a coronet, then KING LEAR, then the DUKES OF ALBANY and CORNWALL, next GONERIL, REGAN, CORDELIA, with followers.*]

LEAR. Attend the lords of France and Burgundy, Gloucester.

GLOUCESTER. I shall, my liege. [*Exeunt GLOUCESTER and EDMUND.*]

LEAR. Meantime we shall express our darker¹¹ purpose.
Give me the map there. Know that we have divided
In three our kingdom; and 't is our fast intent
To shake all cares and business from our age,
Conferring them on younger strengths, while we
Unburden'd crawl toward death. Our son of Cornwall,
And you, our no less loving son of Albany,

¹ affected—favored. [*The footnotes used are those of the editor of this edition of the play, Alan S. Downer. L.T.*] ² equalities—shares. ³ weigh'd—balanced. ⁴ curiosity—

close examination. ⁵ of—between. ⁶ moiety—share. ⁷ brazed—hardened.

⁸ conceive—understand. ⁹ whoreson—bastard. ¹⁰ Sennet—trumpet fanfare.

¹¹ darker—hitherto secret.

We have this hour a constant will to publish
 Our daughters' several¹² dowers, that future strife
 May be prevented now. The Princes, France and Burgundy,
 Great rivals in our youngest daughter's love,
 Long in our court have made their amorous sojourn,
 And here are to be answer'd. Tell me, my daughters,—
 Since now we will divest us both of rule,
 Interest¹³ of territory, cares of state,—
 Which of you shall we say doth love us most,
 That we our largest bounty may extend
 Where nature¹⁴ doth with merit¹⁵ challenge?¹⁶ Goneril,
 Our eldest-born, speak first.

CONERIL. Sir, I do love you more than words can wield¹⁷ the matter;
 Dearer than eye-sight, space, and liberty:
 Beyond what can be valued, rich or rare;
 No less than life, with grace, health, beauty, honour;
 As much as child e'er lov'd, or father found;
 A love that makes breath poor, and speech unable:
 Beyond all manner of so much¹⁸ I love you.

CORDELIA [*aside*]. What shall Cordelia speak? Love and be silent.

LEAR. Of all these bounds, even from this line to this,
 With shadowy forest and with champains¹⁹ rich'd,
 With plenteous rivers and wide-skirted meads,
 We make thee lady. To thine and Albany's issues
 Be this perpetual. What says our second daughter,
 Our dearest Regan, wife of Cornwall? Speak.

REGAN. I am made of that self²⁰ metal as my sister,
 And prize me at her worth.²¹ In my true heart
 I find she names my very deed of love;
 Only she comes too short, that I profess
 Myself an enemy to all other joys
 Which the most precious square²² of sense possesses;
 And find I am alone felicitate²³
 In your Highness' love.

CORDELIA [*aside*]. Then poor Cordelia!
 And yet not so; since, I am sure, my love's
 More ponderous²⁴ than my tongue.

LEAR. To thee and thine hereditary ever
 Remain this ample third of our fair kingdom;
 No less in space, validity,²⁵ and pleasure,

¹² several—separate. ¹³ Interest—possession. ¹⁴ nature—natural affection. ¹⁵ with merit—plus individual merit. ¹⁶ challenge—make a claim. ¹⁷ wield—express. ¹⁸ of so much—of these things. ¹⁹ champains—fields. ²⁰ self—same. ²¹ prize me at her worth—appraise myself her equal. ²² square—criterion. ²³ felicitate—made happy. ²⁴ more ponderous—weightier. ²⁵ validity—value.

Than that conferr'd on Goneril. Now, our joy,
Although our last and least, to whose young love
The vines of France and milk of Burgundy
Strive to be interest'd,²⁶ what can you say to draw
A third more opulent than your sisters? Speak.

CORDELIA. Nothing, my lord.

LEAR. Nothing!

CORDELIA. Nothing.

LEAR. Nothing will come of nothing. Speak again.

CORDELIA. Unhappy that I am, I cannot heave
My heart into my mouth. I love your Majesty
According to my bond;²⁷ nor more nor less.

LEAR. How, how, Cordelia! Mend your speech a little,
Lest you may mar your fortune.

CORDELIA. Good my lord,
You have begot me, bred me, lov'd me: I
Return those duties back as are right fit;
Obey you, love you, and most honour you.
Why have my sisters husbands, if they say
They love you all? Haply,²⁸ when I shall wed,
That lord whose hand must take my plight²⁹ shall carry
Half my love with him, half my care and duty.
Sure, I shall never marry like my sisters
To love my father all.

LEAR. But goes thy heart with this?

CORDELIA. Ay, my good lord.

LEAR. So young, and so untender?

CORDELIA. So young, my lord, and true.

LEAR. Let it be so; thy truth, then, be thy dower!

For, by the sacred radiance of the sun,
The mysteries of Hecate,³⁰ and the night;
By all the operation of the orbs³¹
From whom we do exist, and cease to be;
Here I disclaim all my paternal care,
Propinquity³² and property of blood,
And as a stranger to my heart and me
Hold thee, from this, for ever. The barbarous Scythian,³³
Or he that makes his generation messes³⁴

To gorge his appetite, shall to my bosom
Be as well neighbour'd, piti'd, and reliev'd,
As thou my sometime daughter.

KENT. Good my liege,—

LEAR. Peace, Kent!

Come not between the dragon³⁵ and his wrath.

²⁶ be interest'd—enter a claim. ²⁷ bond—bounden duty. ²⁸ Haply—It may happen.
²⁹ plight—troth. ³⁰ Hecate—goddess of witchcraft. ³¹ orbs—stars. ³² Propinquity
—relationship. ³³ Scythian—South Russian, regarded as extremely savage. ³⁴ makes
his generation messes—makes food of his children. ³⁵ dragon—traditional symbol of
British kings.

LEAR.

O, vassal! miscreant!

[*Laying his hand on his sword.*]

ALBANY.

CORNWALL. } Dear sir, forbear.

KENT. Kill thy physician, and thy fee bestow
Upon the foul disease. Revoke thy doom;
Or, whilst I can vent clamour from my throat,
I'll tell thee thou dost evil.

LEAR.

Hear me, recreant!

On thine allegiance, hear me!
That thou hast sought to make us break our vows,
Which we durst never yet, and with strain'd pride
To come betwixt our sentence and our power,
Which nor our nature nor our place can bear,
Our potency made good,⁴⁸ take thy reward.
Five days we do allot thee, for provision
To shield thee from diseases of the world;
And on the sixth to turn thy hated back
Upon our kingdom. If, on the tenth day following,
Thy banish'd trunk be found in our dominions,
The moment is thy death. Away! By Jupiter,⁴⁹
This shall not be revok'd.

KENT. Fare thee well, king! Sith⁵⁰ thus thou wilt appear,
Freedom lives hence, and banishment is here.

[*To CORDELIA.*] The gods to their dear shelter take thee, maid,
That justly think'st, and hast most rightly said!

[*To REGAN and GONERIL.*] And your large speeches may your deeds approve,⁵¹
That good effects⁵² may spring from words of love.

Thus Kent, O princes, bids you all adieu;
He'll shape his old course⁵³ in a country new. [*Exit.*]

[*Flourish.*⁵⁴ Enter GLOUCESTER, with FRANCE and BURGUNDY, Attendants.]

GLOUCESTER. Here's France⁵⁵ and Burgundy,⁵⁶ my noble lord.

LEAR. My Lord of Burgundy,
We first address toward you, who with this king
Hath rivall'd for our daughter. What, in the least,
Will you require⁵⁷ in present⁵⁸ dower with her,
Or cease your quest of love?

BURGUNDY.

Most royal Majesty.

I crave no more than hath your Highness offer'd,
Nor will you tender⁵⁹ less.

LEAR.

Right noble Burgundy,

When she was dear to us, we did hold her so;
But now her price is fal'n. Sir, there she stands:

⁴⁸ our potency made good—my royal will having been asserted. ⁴⁹ Jupiter—chief of the Roman gods. The classic pantheon is used in this play to fit a pagan, not necessarily Roman, society. ⁵⁰ Sith—since. ⁵¹ approve—confirm. ⁵² effects—actions. ⁵³ old course—i.e., as a faithful, plain-spoken subject. ⁵⁴ Flourish—trumpet fanfare. ⁵⁵ France—the king of France. ⁵⁶ Burgundy—the duke of Burgundy. ⁵⁷ require—request. ⁵⁸ present—immediate. ⁵⁹ tender—offer.

If aught within that little-seeming substance,
Or all of it, with our displeasure piec'd,⁶⁰
And nothing more, may fitly like your Grace,
She's there, and she is yours.

BURGUNDY. I know no answer.

LEAR. Will you, with those infirmities she owes,⁶¹
Unfriended, new-adopted to our hate,
Dower'd with our curse, and stranger'd with our oath,
Take her, or leave her?

BURGUNDY. Pardon me, royal sir;
Election⁶² makes not up in such conditions.

LEAR. Then leave her, sir; for, by the power that made me,
I tell you all her wealth. [To FRANCE.] For you, great king,
I would not from your love make such a stray,
To match you where I hate; therefore beseech you
T' avert your liking a more worthier way
Than on a wretch whom Nature is asham'd
Almost t' acknowledge hers.

FRANCE. This is most strange,
That she, that even but now was your best object,⁶³
The argument of your praise, balm of your age,
Most best, most dearest, should in this trice⁶⁴ of time
Commit a thing so monstrous, to dismantle
So many folds of favour. Sure, her offence
Must be of such unnatural degree,
That monsters⁶⁵ it, or your fore-vouch'd⁶⁶ affection
Fall'n into taint;⁶⁷ which to believe of her,
Must be a faith that reason without miracle
Should never plant in me.

CORDELIA. I yet beseech your Majesty,—
If for I want that glib and oily art,
To speak and purpose not; since what I well intend,
I'll do 't before I speak,—that you make known
It is no vicious blot,⁶⁸ murder, or foulness,
No unchaste action, or dishonoured step,
That hath depriv'd me of your grace and favour;
But even for want⁶⁹ of that for which I am richer,
A still-soliciting⁷⁰ eye, and such a tongue
That I am glad I have not, though not to have it
Hath lost me in your liking.

LEAR. Better thou
Hadst not been born than not to have pleas'd me better.

FRANCE. It is but this,—a tardiness⁷¹ in nature
Which often leaves the history unspoke

⁶⁰ piec'd—added. ⁶¹ owes—possesses. ⁶² Election—choice. ⁶³ best object—favor-
ite. ⁶⁴ trice—moment. ⁶⁵ monsters—makes monstrous. ⁶⁶ fore-vouch'd—previously
declared. ⁶⁷ into taint—decay. ⁶⁸ vicious blot—immoral act. ⁶⁹ want—lack.
⁷⁰ still-soliciting—always asking favors. ⁷¹ tardiness—reticence.

That it intends to do? My Lord of Burgundy,
What say you to the lady? Love is not love
When it is mingled with regards⁷² that stands
Aloof from th' entire point.⁷³ Will you have her?
She is herself a dowry.

BURGUNDY. Royal Lear,
Give but that portion which yourself propos'd,
And here I take Cordelia by the hand,
Duchess of Burgundy.

LEAR. Nothing. I have sworn; I am firm.

BURGUNDY. I am sorry, then, you have so lost a father
That you must lose a husband.

CORDELIA. Peace be with Burgundy!
Since that respects of fortune⁷⁴ are his love,
I shall not be his wife.

FRANCE. Fairest Cordelia, that art most rich being poor,
Most choice forsaken, and most lov'd despis'd!
Thee and thy virtues here I seize upon,
Be it lawful I take up what's cast away.
Gods, gods! 't is strange that from their cold'st neglect
My love should kindle to inflam'd⁷⁵ respect.
Thy dowerless daughter, king, thrown to my chance,
Is queen of us, of ours, and our fair France.
Not all the dukes of waterish Burgundy
Shall buy this unpriz'd precious maid of me.
Bid them farewell, Cordelia, though unkind;
Thou lovest here, a better where⁷⁶ to find.

LEAR. Thou hast her, France. Let her be thine; for we
Have no such daughter, nor shall ever see
That face of hers again.—[*To CORDELIA.*] Therefore be gone
Without our grace, our love, our benison.⁷⁷
Come, noble Burgundy. [*Flourish. Exeunt LEAR and BURGUNDY.*]

FRANCE. Bid farewell to your sisters.

CORDELIA. The jewels of our father, with wash'd eyes
Cordelia leaves you. I know you what you are;
And like a sister am most loath to call
Your faults as they are named. Use well our father,
To your professed⁷⁸ bosoms I commit him;
But yet, alas, stood I within his grace,
I would prefer him to a better place.
So, farewell to you both.

REGAN. Prescribe not us our duties.

GONERIL. Let your study
Be to content your lord, who hath receiv'd you

⁷² regards—considerations. ⁷³ entire point—love. ⁷⁴ respects of fortune—considerations of my dowry. ⁷⁵ inflam'd—passionate. ⁷⁶ where—place. ⁷⁷ benison—blessing. ⁷⁸ professed—professing (love).

At fortune's alms.⁷⁹ You have obedience scanted,⁸⁰

And well are worth⁸¹ the want⁸² that you have wanted.⁸³

CORDELIA. Time shall unfold what plighted⁸⁴ cunning hides;
Who covers faults, at last shame them derides.

Well may you prosper!

FRANCE. Come, my fair Cordelia. [*Exeunt FRANCE and CORDELIA.*]

GONERIL. Sister, it is not little I have to say of what most nearly appertains to us both. I think our father will hence tonight.

REGAN. That's most certain, and with you; next month with us.

GONERIL. You see how full of changes his age is; the observation we have made of it hath not been little. He always loved our sister most; and with what poor judgement he hath now cast her off appears too gross.⁸⁵

REGAN. 'T is the infirmity of his age; yet he hath ever but slenderly known himself.

GONERIL. The best and soundest of his time⁸⁶ hath been but rash; then must we look to receive from his age not alone the imperfections of long-engrafted condition,⁸⁷ but therewithal the unruly waywardness that infirm and choleric years bring with them.

REGAN. Such unconstant starts⁸⁸ are we like to have from him as this of Kent's banishment.

GONERIL. There is further compliment of leave-taking between France and him. Pray you, let's hit⁸⁹ together; if our father carry authority with such disposition as he bears, this last surrender of his will but offend⁹⁰ us.

REGAN. We shall further think on 't.

GONERIL. We must do something, and i' th' heat.⁹¹ [*Exeunt.*]

ACT I · 2

The Earl of Gloucester's castle.

[*Enter EDMUND with a letter.*]

EDMUND. Thou, Nature, art my goddess; to thy law
My services are bound. Wherefore should I
Stand in the plague¹ of custom, and permit
The curiosity² of nations to deprive me,
For that I am some twelve or fourteen moonshines
Lag³ of a brother? Why bastard? Wherefore base?
When my dimensions are as well compact,
My mind as generous, and my shape as true,
As honest madam's issue? Why brand they us

⁷⁹ at fortune's alms—as charity from fortune. ⁸⁰ scanted—fallen short in. ⁸¹ worth—deserve. ⁸² want—lack of love (from your husband). ⁸³ wanted—as you have shown lack of love for your father. ⁸⁴ plighted—folded. ⁸⁵ gross—obvious. ⁸⁶ of his time—periods of his life. ⁸⁷ long-engrafted condition—natural temperament. ⁸⁸ starts—whims. ⁸⁹ hit—agree. ⁹⁰ offend—give trouble. ⁹¹ i' th' heat—while the iron is hot.

¹ plague—vexation. ² curiosity—absurd law. ³ Lag—behind.

With base? with baseness? bastardy? base, base?
 Who, in the lusty stealth of nature, take
 More composition⁴ and fierce quality⁵
 Than doth, within a dull, stale, tired bed,
 Go to th' creating a whole tribe of fops,
 Got⁶ 'tween asleep and wake? Well then,
 Legitimate Edgar, I must have your land.
 Our father's love is to the bastard Edmund
 As to th' legitimate. Fine word, "legitimate"!
 Well, my legitimate, if this letter speed⁷
 And my invention thrive, Edmund the base
 Shall top th' legitimate. I grow; I prosper.
 Now, gods, stand up for bastards!

[Enter GLOUCESTER.]

GLOUCESTER. Kent banish'd thus! and France in choler⁸ parted!
 And the King gone to-night! subscrib'd⁹ his power!
 Confin'd to exhibition!¹⁰ All this done
 Upon the gad!¹¹ Edmund, how now! what news?

EDMUND. So please your lordship, none. [*Putting up the letter.*]

GLOUCESTER. Why so earnestly seek you to put up that letter?

EDMUND. I know no news, my lord.

GLOUCESTER. What paper were you reading?

EDMUND. Nothing, my lord.

GLOUCESTER. No? What needed, then, that terrible dispatch of it into
 your pocket? The quality of nothing hath not such need to hide itself. Let's see.
 Come, if it be nothing, I shall not need spectacles.

EDMUND. I beseech you, sir, pardon me. It is a letter from my brother,
 that I have not all o'erread; and for so much as I have perused, I find it not fit
 for your o'erlooking.

GLOUCESTER. Give me the letter, sir.

EDMUND. I shall offend, either to detain or give it. The contents, as in
 part I understand them, are to blame.¹²

GLOUCESTER. Let's see, let's see.

EDMUND. I hope, for my brother's justification, he wrote this but as an
 essay¹³ or taste of my virtue.

GLOUCESTER [*reads*].

This policy¹⁴ and reverence of age makes the world bitter to the best of our
 times;¹⁵ keeps our fortunes from us till our oldness cannot relish them. I begin to
 find an idle and fond¹⁶ bondage in the oppression of aged tyranny; who sways, not
 as it hath power, but as it is suffered.¹⁷ Come to me, that of this I may speak more.
 If our father would sleep till I waked him, you should enjoy half his revenue for
 ever, and live the beloved of your brother,

EDGAR.

⁴ composition—strength. ⁵ fierce quality—energy. ⁶ Got—conceived. ⁷ speed—
 prosper. ⁸ choler—anger. ⁹ subscrib'd—signed away. ¹⁰ exhibition—a pension.
¹¹ gad—spur of the moment. ¹² to blame—blameworthy. ¹³ essay—test. ¹⁴ pol-
 icy and reverence—strategy of requiring reverence for. ¹⁵ our times—our youth.
¹⁶ fond—foolish. ¹⁷ suffered—submitted to.

Hum—conspiracy!—"Sleep till I wake him, you should enjoy half his *révénue*!" My son Edgar! Had he a hand to write this? a heart and brain to breed it in?—When came this to you? Who brought it?

EDMUND. It was not brought me, my lord; there's the cunning of it. I found it thrown in at the casement of my closet.¹⁸

GLOUCESTER. You know the character¹⁹ to be your brother's?

EDMUND. If the matter were good, my lord, I durst swear it were his; but, in respect of that, I would fain think it were not.

GLOUCESTER. It is his.

EDMUND. It is his hand, my lord; but I hope his heart is not in the contents.

GLOUCESTER. Hath he never heretofore sounded you in this business?

EDMUND. Never, my lord; but I have heard him oft maintain it to be fit that, sons at perfect age, and fathers declined, the father should be as ward to the son, and the son manage his *révénue*.

GLOUCESTER. O villain, villain! His very opinion in the letter! Abhorred villain! Unnatural, detested, brutish villain! worse than brutish! Go, sirrah, seek him; I'll apprehend him. Abominable villain! Where is he?

EDMUND. I do not well know, my lord. It it shall please you to suspend your indignation against my brother till you can derive from him better testimony of his intent, you should run a certain course;²⁰ where, if you violently proceed against him, mistaking his purpose, it would make a great gap in your own honour, and shake in pieces the heart of his obedience. I dare pawn down my life for him, that he hath wrote this to feel my affection to your honour, and to no further pretence of danger.

GLOUCESTER. Think you so?

EDMUND. If your honour judge it meet, I will place you where you shall hear us confer of this, and by an auricular assurance²¹ have your satisfaction; and that without any further delay than this very evening.

GLOUCESTER. He cannot be such a monster—

EDMUND. Nor is not, sure.

GLOUCESTER. To his father, that so tenderly and entirely loves him. Heaven and earth! Edmund, seek him out; wind me into him,²² I pray you. Frame the business after your own wisdom. I would unstate²³ myself, to be in a due resolution.²⁴

EDMUND. I will seek him, sir, presently;²⁵ convey²⁶ the business as I shall find means, and acquaint you withal.²⁷

GLOUCESTER. These late eclipses in the sun and moon portend no good to us. Though the wisdom of nature can reason²⁸ it thus and thus, yet nature finds itself scourged by the sequent²⁹ effects. Love cools, friendship falls off, brothers divide: in cities, mutinies; in countries, discord; in palaces, treason; and the bond cracked 'twixt son and father. This villain of mine comes under the prediction; there's son against father: the King falls from bias of nature; there's father against child. We have seen the best of our time; machinations,

¹⁸ closet—private room.

¹⁹ character—handwriting.

surely. ²¹ auricular assurance—hearing the evidence.

²⁰ certain course—proceed more

confidence. ²³ unstate—give up my earldom.

²² wind me into him—gain his

²⁵ presently—immediately.

²⁶ convey—conduct.

²⁴ in a due resolution—freed of doubts.

²⁸ reason—explain.

²⁹ sequent—consequent.

²⁷ withal—with the results.

hollowness, treachery, and all ruinous disorders, follow us disquietly to our graves. Find out this villain, Edmund; it shall lose thee nothing; do it carefully. And the noble and true-hearted Kent banished! his offence, honesty! 'T is strange. [*Exit.*]

EDMUND. This is the excellent foppery³⁰ of the world, that, when we are sick in fortune,—often the surfeit³¹ of our own behaviour,—we make guilty of our disasters the sun, the moon, and the stars, as if we were villains on necessity, fools by heavenly compulsion, knaves, and treachers by spherical predominance,³² drunkards, liars, and adulterers by an enforced obedience of planetary influence, and all that we are evil in, by a divine thrusting on. An admirable evasion of whoremaster man, to lay his goatish³³ disposition on the charge of a star! My father compounded with my mother under the dragon's tail and my nativity was under *Ursa major*,³⁴ so that it follows, I am rough and lecherous. Fut, I should have been that I am, had the maidenliest star in the firmament twinkled on my bastardizing. Edgar—

[*Enter EDGAR.*]

and pat he comes like the catastrophe³⁵ of the old comedy. My cue is villainous melancholy, with a sigh like Tom o' Bedlam.³⁶—O, these eclipses do portend these divisions! *fa, sol, la, mi.*

EDGAR. How now, brother Edmund! what serious contemplation are you in?

EDMUND. I am thinking, brother, of a prediction I read this other day, what should follow these eclipses.

EDGAR. Do you busy yourself with that?

EDMUND. I promise you, the effects he writ of succeed³⁷ unhappily; as of unnaturalness between the child and the parent; death, dearth,³⁸ dissolutions of ancient amities; divisions in state, menaces and maledictions against king and nobles; needless diffidences, banishment of friends, dissipation of cohorts, nuptial breaches, and I know not what.

EDGAR. How long have you been a sectary astronomical?³⁹

EDMUND. Come, come; when saw you my father last?

EDGAR. Why, the night gone by.

EDMUND. Spake you with him?

EDGAR. Ay, two hours together.

EDMUND. Parted you in good terms? Found you no displeasure in him by word nor countenance?

EDGAR. None at all.

EDMUND. Bethink yourself wherein you may have offended him; and at my entreaty forbear his presence until some little time hath qualified⁴⁰ the heat of his displeasure, which at this instant so rageth in him, that with the mischief of⁴¹ your person it would scarce allay.

EDGAR. Some villain hath done me wrong.

EDMUND. That's my fear. I pray you, have a continent forbearance⁴² till

³⁰ foppery—folly.

³¹ surfeit—overeating, i.e., because of our own overindulgence.

³² spherical predominance—influence of the planets. ³³ goatish—lustful. ³⁴ *Ursa*

major—the constellation of the Great Bear. ³⁵ catastrophe—final event. ³⁶ Tom o'

Bedlam—lunatic beggar. ³⁷ succeed—follow. ³⁸ dearth—famine. ³⁹ sectary as-

tronomical—believer in astrology. ⁴⁰ qualified—modified. ⁴¹ Mischief of—injury to.

⁴² continent forbearance—self-control.

the speed of his rage goes slower; and, as I say, retire with me to my lodging, from whence I will fitly bring you to hear my lord speak. Pray ye, go; there's my key. If you do stir abroad, go armed.

EDGAR. Armed, brother!

EDMUND. Brother, I advise you to the best; I am no honest man if there be any good meaning towards you. I have told you what I have seen and heard; but faintly, nothing like the image and horror of it. Pray you, away.

EDGAR. Shall I hear from you anon?⁴³

EDMUND. I do serve you in this business. [*Exit* EDGAR.]

A credulous father, and a brother noble,
Whose nature is so far from doing harms
That he suspects none; on whose foolish honesty
My practices⁴⁴ ride easy. I see the business.
Let me, if not by birth, have lands by wit:
All with me's meet⁴⁵ that I can fashion fit. [*Exit.*]

ACT I · 3

The Duke of Albany's palace.

[*Enter* GONERIL, and OSWALD, her Steward.]

GONERIL. Did my father strike my gentleman for chiding of his Fool?

OSWALD. Ay, madam.

GONERIL. By day and night he wrongs me; every hour
He flashes into one gross crime or other
That sets us all at odds. I'll not endure it.
His knights grow riotous, and himself upbraids us
On every trifle. When he returns from hunting,
I will not speak with him; say I am sick.
If you come slack of former services,
You shall do well; the fault of it I'll answer.

OSWALD. He's coming, madam; I hear him. [*Horns within.*]

GONERIL. Put on what weary negligence you please,
You and your fellows, I'd have it come to question,¹
If he distaste² it, let him to our sister,
Whose mind and mine, I know, in that are one,
Not to be over-rul'd. Idle old man,
That still would manage those authorities
That he hath given away! Now, by my life,
Old fools are babes again, and must be us'd
With checks³ as⁴ flatteries, when they are seen abus'd.⁵
Remember what I have said.

OSWALD. Well, madam.

⁴³ anon—soon. ⁴⁴ practices—plots. ⁴⁵ meet—proper.

¹ question—open discussion.

² distaste—dislike.

³ checks—rebukes.

⁴ as—as well

as. ⁵ abus'd—misled.

GONERIL. And let his knights have colder looks among you;
What grows of it, no matter. Advise your fellow so.
I would breed from hence occasions,⁶ and I shall,
That I may speak. I'll write straight to my sister,
To hold my very course. Prepare for dinner. [*Exeunt.*]

ACT I · 4

A hall in the same.

[*Enter KENT disguised.*]

KENT. If but as well I other accents borrow,
That can my speech defuse,¹ my good intent
May carry through itself to that full issue
For which I raz'd² my likeness. Now, banish'd Kent,
If thou canst serve where thou dost stand condemn'd,
So may it come, thy master, whom thou lov'st,
Shall find thee full of labours.

[*Horns within. Enter LEAR, KNIGHTS, and Attendants.*]

LEAR. Let me not stay a jot for dinner; go get it ready.
[*Exit an Attendant.*] How now! what art thou?

KENT. A man, sir.

LEAR. What dost thou profess? What wouldst thou with us?

KENT. I do profess to be no less than I seem; to serve him truly that will
put me in trust; to love him that is honest; to converse with him that is wise
and says little; to fear judgement; to fight when I cannot choose; and to eat no
fish.³

LEAR. What art thou?

KENT. A very honest-hearted fellow, and as poor as the King.

LEAR. If thou be as poor for a subject as he is for a king, thou art poor
enough. What wouldst thou?

KENT. Service.

LEAR. Who wouldst thou serve?

KENT. You.

LEAR. Dost thou know me, fellow?

KENT. No, sir; but you have that in your countenance which I would
fain call master.

LEAR. What's that?

KENT. Authority.

LEAR. What services canst thou do?

KENT. I can keep honest counsel, ride, run, mar a curious tale in telling
it, and deliver a plain message bluntly. That which ordinary men are fit for, I
am qualified in; and the best of me is diligence.

⁶ occasions—opportunities.

¹ defuse—disguise. ² raz'd—shaved off (my beard).

³ eat no fish—be a Protestant.

LEAR. How old art thou?

KENT. Not so young, sir, to love a woman for singing, nor so old to dote on her for anything. I have years on my back forty-eight.

LEAR. Follow me; thou shalt serve me. If I like thee no worse after dinner, I will not part from thee yet. Dinner, ho, dinner! Where's my knave? my Fool? Go you, and call my Fool hither. [*Exit an Attendant.*]

[*Enter the Steward, OSWALD.*]

You, you, sirrah, where's my daughter?

OSWALD. So please you,— [*Exit.*]

LEAR. What says the fellow there? Call the clotpoll⁴ back. [*Exit a KNIGHT.*] Where's my Fool, ho? I think the world's asleep.

[*Enter KNIGHT.*]

How now! where's that mongrel?

KNIGHT. He says, my lord, your daughter is not well.

LEAR. Why came not the slave back to me when I called him?

KNIGHT. Sir, he answered me in the roundest⁵ manner, he would not.

LEAR. 'A⁶ would not!

KNIGHT. My lord, I know not what the matter is; but, to my judgement, your Highness is not entertain'd with that ceremonious affection as you were wont. There's a great abatement of kindness appears as well in the general dependants as in the Duke himself also and your daughter.

LEAR. Ha! say'st thou so?

KNIGHT. I beseech you, pardon me, my lord, if I be mistaken; for my duty cannot be silent when I think your Highness wronged.

LEAR. Thou but rememb'rest me of mine own conception.⁷ I have perceived a most faint neglect of late, which I have rather blamed as mine own jealous curiosity⁸ than as a very pretence and purpose of unkindness. I will look further into 't. But where's my Fool? I have not seen him this two days.

KNIGHT. Since my young lady's going into France, sir, the Fool hath much pined away.

LEAR. No more of that; I have noted it well. Go you, and tell my daughter I would speak with her. [*Exit an Attendant.*] Go you, call hither my Fool. [*Exit an Attendant.*]

[*Enter OSWALD.*]

O, you sir, you sir, come you hither. Who am I, sir?

OSWALD. My lady's father.

LEAR. "My lady's father"! My lord's knave! You whoreson dog! you slave! you cur!

OSWALD. I am none of these, my lord; I beseech your pardon.

LEAR. Do you bandy⁹ looks with me, you rascal? [*Striking him.*]

OSWALD. I'll not be stricken, my lord.

KENT. Nor tripped neither, you base football player. [*Tripping up his heels.*]

LEAR. I thank thee, fellow. Thou serv'st me, and I'll love thee.

KENT. Come, sir, arise, away! I'll teach you differences.¹⁰ Away, away!

⁴ clotpoll—blockhead.

⁵ roundest—most direct.

⁶ 'A—he.

⁷ conception—idea,

thought. ⁸ curiosity—watchfulness.

⁹ bandy—exchange.

¹⁰ differences—distinctions (of rank).

If you will measure your lubber's length again, tarry; but away! go to.¹¹ Have you wisdom? So. [*Pushes OSWALD out.*]

LEAR. Now, my friendly knave, I thank thee. There's earnest¹² of thy service. [*Giving KENT money.*]

[*Enter FOOL.*]

FOOL. Let me hire him too; here's my coxcomb.¹³ [*Offering KENT his cap.*]

LEAR. How now, my pretty knave! how dost thou?

FOOL. Sirrah, you were best take my coxcomb.

KENT. Why, Fool?

FOOL. Why? For taking one's part that's out of favour. Nay, an thou canst not smile as the wind sits;¹⁴ thou 'lt catch cold shortly. There, take my coxcomb. Why, this fellow hath banished two on¹⁵ 's daughters, and did the third a blessing against his will; if thou follow him, thou must needs wear my coxcomb.—How now, nuncle!¹⁶ Would I had two coxcombs and two daughters!

LEAR. Why, my boy?

FOOL. If I gave them all my living, I'd keep my coxcombs myself. There's mine; beg another of thy daughters.

LEAR. Take heed, sirrah; the whip.

FOOL. Truth's a dog must to kennel; he must be whipped out, when Lady the brach¹⁷ may stand by the fire and stink.

LEAR. A pestilent gall¹⁸ to me!

FOOL. Sirrah, I'll teach thee a speech.

LEAR. Do.

FOOL. Mark it, nuncle:

Have more than thou showest,
Speak less than thou knowest,
Lend less than thou owest,¹⁹
Ride more than thou goest,
Learn more than thou trowest,²⁰
Set²¹ less than thou throwest;
Leave thy drink and thy whore,
And keep in-a-door,
And thou shalt have more
Than two tens to a score.

KENT. This is nothing, Fool.

FOOL. Then 'tis like the breath of an unfee'd lawyer; you gave me nothing for 't. Can you make no use of nothing, nuncle?

LEAR. Why, no, boy; nothing can be made out of nothing.

FOOL. [*To KENT*] Prithee, tell him so much the rent²² of his land comes to. He will not believe a Fool.

LEAR. A bitter fool!

FOOL. Dost thou know the difference, my boy, between a bitter fool and a sweet fool?

LEAR. No, lad; teach me.

¹¹ go to—an exclamation of impatience. ¹² earnest—advance money. ¹³ coxcomb—fool's cap, the badge of the fool's profession. ¹⁴ smile as the wind sits—agree with those in power. ¹⁵ on—of. ¹⁶ nuncle—uncle. ¹⁷ brach—favorite bitch. ¹⁸ pestilent gall—always rubbing a sore spot. ¹⁹ owest—own. ²⁰ trowest—believe. ²¹ Set—wager. ²² rent—income.

FOOL.

That lord that counsell'd thee
To give away thy land,
Come place him here by me,
Do thou for him stand:
The sweet and bitter fool
Will presently appear;
The one in motley²³ here,
The other found out there.

LEAR. Dost thou call me fool, boy?

FOOL. All thy other titles thou hast given away; that thou wast born with.

KENT. This is not altogether fool, my lord.

FOOL. No, faith, lords and great men will not let me; if I had a monopoly²⁴ out, they would have part²⁵ on 't. And ladies, too, they will not let me have all the fool to myself; they'll be snatching. Nuncle, give me an egg, and I'll give thee two crowns.

LEAR. What two crowns shall they be?

FOOL. Why, after I have cut the egg i' th' middle, and eat up the meat, the two crowns of the egg. When thou clovest thy crown i' th' middle, and gav'st away both parts, thou bor'st thine ass²⁶ on thy back o'er the dirt. Thou hadst little wit in thy bald crown, when thou gav'st thy golden one away. If I speak like myself²⁷ in this, let him be whipped that first finds it so.

Fools had ne'er less grace²⁸ in a year;
For wise men are grown foppish,
And know not how their wits to wear,
Their manners are so apish.²⁹

LEAR. When were you wont to be so full of songs, sirrah?

FOOL. I have used it, nuncle, ever since thou mad'st thy daughters thy mother, for when thou gav'st them the rod, and puttest down thine own breeches,

Then they for sudden joy did weep,
And I for sorrow sung,
That such a king should play bo-peep³⁰
And go the fools among.

Prithee, nuncle, keep a schoolmaster that can teach thy Fool to lie. I would fain learn to lie.

LEAR. An³¹ you lie, sirrah, we'll have you whipped.

FOOL. I marvel what kin thou and thy daughters are. They'll have me whipped for speaking true, thou 'lt have me whipped for lying; and sometimes I am whipp'd for holding my peace. I had rather be any kind o' thing than a Fool; and yet I would not be thee, nuncle; thou hast pared thy wit o' both sides, and left nothing i' the middle. Here comes one o' the parings.

²³ motley—the professional fool's parti-colored costume. ²⁴ monopoly—the right to be sole dealer (in folly). ²⁵ part—their share. ²⁶ thine ass—like the countryman who carried his donkey when the roads were bad. ²⁷ like myself—foolishly. ²⁸ grave—favor. ²⁹ apish—i.e., imitating fools. ³⁰ bo-peep—hide and seek. ³¹ An—if.

[Enter GONERIL.]

LEAR. How now, daughter! what makes that frontlet³² on? Methinks you are too much of late i' th' frown.

FOOL. Thou wast a pretty fellow when thou hadst no need to care for her frowning; now thou art an O³³ without a figure. I am better than thou art now; I am a Fool, thou art nothing. [To GONERIL.] Yes, forsooth, I will hold my tongue; so your face bids me, though you say nothing.

Mum, mum,
He that keeps nor crust nor crumb,
Weary of all, shall want some.

[Pointing to LEAR.] That's a sheal'd peascod.³⁴

GONERIL. Not only, sir, this your all-licens'd³⁵ Fool,
But other of your insolent retinue
Do hourly carp and quarrel, breaking forth
In rank and not-to-be-endured riots. Sir,
I had thought, by making this well known unto you,
To have found a safe redress; but now grow fearful,
By what yourself, too, late have spoke and done,
That you protect this course, and put it on³⁶
By your allowance;³⁷ which if you should, the fault
Would not scape censure, nor the redresses sleep,
Which, in the tender³⁸ of a wholesome weal,³⁹
Might in their working do you that offence,
Which else were shame, that then necessity
Will call discreet proceeding.

FOOL. For, you know, nuncle,
"The hedge-sparrow fed the cuckoo⁴⁰ so long,
That it had it head bit off by it young."⁴¹
So, out went the candle, and we were left darkling.⁴²

LEAR. Are you our daughter?

GONERIL. Come, sir,
I would you would make use of that good wisdom,
Whereof I know you are fraught,⁴³ and put away
These dispositions,⁴⁴ which of late transport you
From what you rightly are.

FOOL. May not an ass know when the cart draws the horse?
"Whoop,⁴⁵ Jug! I love thee."

LEAR. Doth any here know me? This is not Lear.
Doth Lear walk thus? speak thus? Where are his eyes?
Either his notion⁴⁶ weakens, or his discernings
Are lethargied—Ha! waking?⁴⁷ 'T is not so.
Who is it that can tell me who I am?

FOOL. Lear's shadow.

³² frontlet—frown.

³³ O—zero.

³⁴ sheal'd peascod—shelled peapod (nothing).

³⁵ all-licens'd—privileged to say and do as he pleases.

³⁶ put it on—encourage it.

³⁷ allowance—approval.

³⁸ tender—care for.

³⁹ weal—commonwealth.

⁴⁰ cuckoo

—i.e., the cuckoo's young.

⁴¹ young—ungrateful nestling.

⁴² darkling—in the dark.

⁴³ fraught—furnished with.

⁴⁴ dispositions—moods.

⁴⁵ "Whoop, etc."—nonsense.

⁴⁶ notion—understanding.

⁴⁷ waking—am I awake?

LEAR. I would learn that; for, by the marks of sovereignty, knowledge, and reason, I should be false persuaded I had daughters.

FOOL. Which they will make an obedient father.

LEAR. Your name, fair gentlewoman?

CONERIL. This admiration,⁴⁸ sir, is much o' th' savour
Of other your new pranks. I do beseech you
To understand my purposes aright.

As you are old and reverend, you should be wise.
Here do you keep a hundred knights and squires;
Men so disorder'd, so debosh'd⁴⁹ and bold,
That this our court, infected with their manners,
Shows like a riotous inn. Epicurism⁵⁰ and lust
Makes it more like a tavern or a brothel
Than a grac'd palace. The shame itself doth speak
For instant remedy. Be then desir'd
By her, that else will take the thing she begs,
A little to disquantity⁵¹ your train;
And the remainders, that shall still depend,
To be such men as may besort⁵² your age,
Which know themselves and you.

LEAR. Darkness and devils!
Saddle my horses; call my train together!
Degenerate bastard! I'll not trouble thee;
Yet have I left a daughter.

CONERIL. You strike my people; and your disorder'd rabble
Make servants of their betters.

[Enter ALBANY]

LEAR. Woe, that too late repents!—O, sir, are you come?
Is it your will? Speak, sir.—Prepare my horses.—
Ingratitude, thou marble-hearted fiend,
More hideous when thou show'st thee in a child
Than the sea-monster!

ALBANY. Pray, sir, be patient.⁵³

LEAR. [To CONERIL]. Detested kite!⁵⁴ thou liest.
My train are men of choice and rarest parts,
That all particulars of duty know,
And in the most exact regard⁵⁵ support
The worships⁵⁶ of their name. O most small fault,
How ugly didst thou in Cordelia show!
Which, like an engine,⁵⁷ wrench'd my frame of nature
From the fix'd place; drew from my heart all love,
And added to the gall.⁵⁸ O Lear, Lear, Lear!
Beat at this gate, that let thy folly in [*striking his head*],
And thy dear judgement out! Go, go, my people.

ALBANY. My lord, I am guiltless as I am ignorant
Of what hath moved you.

⁴⁸ admiration—pretended surprise.

⁴⁹ debosh'd—debauched.

⁵¹ disquantity—reduce.

⁵² besort—befit.

⁵³ patient—calm.

testable scavenger.

⁵⁵ regard—detail.

⁵⁶ worships—honor.

⁵⁰ Epicurism—gluttony.

⁵⁴ Detested kite—de-

⁵⁷ engine—machine.

⁵⁸ gall—bitterness.

LEAR.

It may be so, my lord.

Hear, Nature! hear, dear goddess, hear!
Suspend thy purpose, if thou didst intend
To make this creature fruitful!
Into her womb convey sterility!
Dry up in her the organs of increase,⁵⁹
And from her derogate⁶⁰ body never spring
A babe to honour her! If she must teem,⁶¹
Create her child of spleen,⁶² that it may live
And be a thwart⁶³ disnatur'd⁶⁴ torment to her!
Let it stamp wrinkles in her brow of youth,
With cadent⁶⁵ tears fret⁶⁶ channels in her cheeks,
Turn all her mother's pains and benefits
To laughter and contempt, that she may feel
How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is
To have a thankless child!—Away, away! [*Exit.*]

ALBANY. Now, gods that we adore, whereof comes this?

GONERIL. Never afflict yourself to know the cause;
But let his disposition⁶⁷ have that scope
That dotage gives it.

[*Re-enter LEAR.*]

LEAR. What, fifty of my followers at a clap!
Within a fortnight!

ALBANY. What's the matter, sir?

LEAR. I'll tell thee. [*To GONERIL.*] Life and death! I am ashamed
That thou hast power to shake my manhood thus;
That these hot tears, which break from me perforce,
Should make thee worth them. Blasts⁶⁸ and fogs upon thee!
The untented⁶⁹ woundings of a father's curse
Pierce every sense about thee! Old fond eyes,
Bewep this cause again, I'll pluck ye out,
And cast you, with the waters that you loose,
To temper clay. Ha! it 't come to this?
Let it be so: I have another daughter,
Who, I am sure, is kind and comfortable.
When she shall hear this of thee, with her nails
She'll flay thy wolvisish visage. Thou shalt find
That I'll resume the shape which thou dost think
I have cast off for ever. Thou shalt, I warrant thee.

[*Exeunt LEAR, KENT, and Attendants.*]

GONERIL. Do you mark that, my lord?

ALBANY. I cannot be so partial,⁷⁰ Goneril,
To the great love I bear you,—

GONERIL. Pray you, content.—What, Oswald, ho!
[*To the FOOL.*] You, sir, more knave than fool, after your master.

⁵⁹ increase—fertility.

⁶⁰ derogate—blighted.

⁶¹ teem—conceive.

⁶² spleen—

malice.

⁶³ thwart—perverse.

⁶⁴ disnatur'd—unnatural.

⁶⁵ cadent—falling.

⁶⁶ fret—wear away.

⁶⁷ disposition—mood.

⁶⁸ Blasts—pestilence.

⁶⁹ untented—

too deep to be probed.

⁷⁰ partial . . . To—influenced by.

FOOL. Nuncle Lear, nuncle Lear! tarry and take the Fool with thee.

A fox, when one has caught her,
And such a daughter,
Should sure to the slaughter,
If my cap would buy a halter.
So the Fool follows after. [*Exit.*]

GONERIL. This man hath had good counsel,—a hundred knights!
'T is politic and safe to let him keep
At point⁷¹ a hundred knights; yes, that, on every dream,
Each buzz, each fancy, each complaint, dislike,
He may enguard his dotage with their powers,
And hold our lives in mercy.⁷² Oswald, I say!

ALBANY. Well, you may fear too far.

GONERIL. Safer than trust too far.

Let me still take away the harms I fear,
Not fear still to be taken.⁷³ I know his heart.
What he hath utter'd I have writ my sister.
If she sustain him and his hundred knights,
When I have show'd the unfitness,—

[*Enter OSWALD.*]

GONERIL. How now, Oswald!

What, have you writ that letter to my sister?

OSWALD. Ay, madam.

GONERIL. Take you some company, and away to horse:
Inform her full of my particular⁷⁴ fear;
And thereto add such reasons of your own
As may compact it more. Get you gone;
And hasten your return. [*Exit OSWALD.*] No, no, my lord,
This milky gentleness and course of yours
Though I condemn not, yet, under pardon,
You are much more at task⁷⁵ for want of wisdom
Than prais'd for harmful mildness.

ALBANY. How far your eyes may pierce I cannot tell.
Striving to better, oft we mar what's well.

GONERIL. Nay, then—

ALBANY. Well, well; the event. [*Exeunt.*]

ACT I · 5

[*Enter LEAR, KENT, and FOOL.*]

LEAR. Go you before to Gloucester with these letters. Acquaint my daughter no further with anything you know than comes from her demand out of the letter. If your diligence be not speedy, I shall be there afore you.

⁷¹ at point—full armed.

⁷² in mercy—at his mercy.

⁷³ taken—i.e., by some harm.

⁷⁴ particular—own.

⁷⁵ at task—to be criticized.

KENT. I will not sleep my lord, till I have delivered your letter. [*Exit.*]
 FOOL. If a man's brains were in 's heels, were 't not in danger of kibes?¹
 LEAR. Ay, boy.
 FOOL. Then, I prithee, be merry; thy wit shall ne'er go slip-shod.²
 LEAR. Ha, ha, ha!
 FOOL. Shalt see thy other daughter will use thee kindly;³ for though she's as like this as a crab⁴ 's like an apple, yet I can tell what I can tell.
 LEAR. What canst tell, boy?
 FOOL. She will taste as like this as a crab does to a crab. Thou canst tell why one's nose stands i' th' middle on 's face?
 LEAR. No.
 FOOL. Why, to keep one's eyes of⁵ either side 's nose, that what a man cannot smell out, he may spy into.
 LEAR. I did her wrong—
 FOOL. Canst tell how an oyster makes his shell?
 LEAR. No.
 FOOL. Nor I neither; but I can tell why a snail has a house.
 LEAR. Why?
 FOOL. Why, to put 's head in; not to give it away to his daughters, and leave his horns without a case.
 LEAR. I will forget my nature. So kind a father! Be my horses ready?
 FOOL. Thy asses are gone about 'em. The reason why the seven stars are no moe⁶ than seven is a pretty reason.
 LEAR. Because they are not eight?
 FOOL. Yes, indeed: Thou wouldst make a good Fool.
 LEAR. To take 't again perforce! Monster ingratitude!
 FOOL. If thou wert my Fool, nuncle, I'd have thee beaten for being old before thy time.
 LEAR. How's that?
 FOOL. Thou shouldst not have been old till thou hadst been wise.
 LEAR. O, let me not be mad, not mad, sweet heaven!
 Keep me in temper;⁷ I would not be mad!
 [*Enter GENTLEMAN.*]
 How now! are the horses ready?
 GENTLEMAN. Ready, my lord.
 LEAR. Come, boy.
 FOOL. She that's a maid now, and laughs at my departure, Shall not be a maid long, unless things be cut shorter. [*Exeunt.*]

ACT II · 1

The Earl of Gloucester's castle.

[*Enter EDMUND and CURAN, meeting*]

EDMUND. Save thee, Curan.

CURAN. And you, sir. I have been with your father, and given him notice

¹ kibes—chilblains. ² slip-shod—in slippers (to protect you from chilblains). ³ kindly—charitably; also, according to her nature. ⁴ crab—crab apple. ⁵ of—on. ⁶ moe—more. ⁷ temper—sanity.

that the Duke of Cornwall and Regan his duchess will be here with him this night.

EDMUND. How comes that?

CURAN. Nay, I know not. You have heard of the news abroad; I mean the whispered ones, for they are yet but ear-kissing¹ arguments?

EDMUND. Not I. Pray you, what are they?

CURAN. Have you heard of no likely wars toward² 'twixt the Dukes of Cornwall and Albany?

EDMUND. Not a word.

CURAN. You may, then, in time. Fare you well, sir. [*Exit.*]

EDMUND. The Duke be here to-night? The better! best!

This weaves itself perforce into my business.

My father hath set guard to take my brother;

And I have one thing, of a queasy question,³

Which I must act. Briefness and fortune, work!

Brother, a word; descend. Brother, I say!

[*Enter EDGAR.*]

My father watches; O sir, fly this place;

Intelligence⁴ is given where you are hid;

You have now the good advantage of the night.

Have you not spoken 'gainst the Duke of Cornwall?

He's coming hither, now, i' th' night, i' th' haste,

And Regan with him. Have you nothing said

Upon his party 'gainst the Duke of Albany?

Advise yourself.⁵

EDGAR. I am sure on 't, not a word.

EDMUND. I hear my father coming: pardon me;
In cunning⁶ I must draw my sword upon you.

Draw; seem to defend yourself; now quit⁷ you well.

Yield! Come before my father. Light, ho, here!

Fly, brother. Torches, torches! So, farewell.

[*Exit EDGAR.*]

Some blood drawn on me would beget opinion [*Wounds his arm.*]

Of my more fierce endeavour. I have seen drunkards

Do more than this in sport. Father! father!

Stop, stop! No help?

[*Enter GLOUCESTER, and Servants with torches.*]

GLOUCESTER. Now, Edmund, where's the villain?

EDMUND. Here stood he in the dark, his sharp sword out,
Mumbling of wicked charms, conjuring the moon
To stand 's auspicious mistress,⁸—

GLOUCESTER. But where is he?

EDMUND. Look, sir, I bleed.

GLOUCESTER. Where is the villain, Edmund?

EDMUND. Fled this way, sir. When by no means he could—

¹ ear-kissing—whispered. ² toward—imminent. ³ of a queasy question—requiring delicate handling. ⁴ Intelligence—information. ⁵ Advise yourself—consider. ⁶ cunning—pretense. ⁷ quit—acquit. ⁸ 's auspicious mistress—be favorable to him.

GLoucester. Pursue him, ho! Go after. [*Exeunt some Servants.*] "By no means" what?

EDMUND. Persuade me to the murder of your lordship;
But that I told him, the revenging gods
'Gainst parricides did all their thunders bend;
Spoke, with how manifold and strong a bond
The child was bound to the father; sir, in fine,⁹
Seeing how loathly opposite I stood
To his unnatural purpose, in fell¹⁰ motion,
With his prepared sword he charges home
My unprovided body, lanc'd mine arm;
But when he saw my best alarum'd spirits,
Bold in the quarrel's right, rous'd to the encounter,
Or whether gasted¹¹ by the noise I made,
Full suddenly he fled.

GLoucester. Let him fly far.
Not in this land shall he remain uncaught;
And found,—dispatch.¹² The noble Duke my master,
My worthy arch¹³ and patron, comes to-night.
By his authority I will proclaim it,
That he which finds him shall deserve our thanks,
Bringing the murderous coward to the stake;
He that conceals him, death.

EDMUND. When I dissuaded him from his intent,
And found him pight¹⁴ to do it, with curst¹⁵ speech
I threaten'd to discover¹⁶ him; he replied,
"Thou unpossessing bastard! dost thou think,
If I would stand against thee, would the reposal
Of any trust, virtue, or worth in thee
Make thy words faith'd?¹⁷ No! what I should deny,—
As this I would; ay, though thou didst produce
My very character,—I'd turn it all
To thy suggestion, plot, and damned practice;
And thou must make a dullard of the world
If they not thought the profits of my death
Were very pregnant¹⁸ and potential¹⁹ spurs
To make thee seek it."

GLoucester. O strong and fasten'd²⁰ villain!
Would he deny his letter? I never got him. [*Tucket²¹ within.*]
Hark, the Duke's trumpets! I know not why he comes.
All ports²² I'll bar, the villain shall not scape;
The Duke must grant me that. Besides, his picture
I will send far and near, that all the kingdom
May have due note of him; and of my land,

⁹ in fine—briefly.

¹⁰ fell—fierce.

¹¹ gasted—panic-stricken.

¹² dispatch—kill him.

¹³ arch—chief.

¹⁴ pight—determined.

¹⁵ curst—angry.

¹⁶ discover—reveal.

¹⁷ faith'd—believed.

¹⁸ pregnant—ready.

¹⁹ potential—powerful.

²⁰ fasten'd—

hardened.

²¹ Tucket—trumpet signal.

²² ports—seaports.

Loyal and natural boy, I'll work the means
To make thee capable.²³

[Enter CORNWALL, REGAN, and Attendants.]

CORNWALL. How now, my noble friend! since I came hither,
Which I can call but now, I have heard strange news.

REGAN. If it be true, all vengeance comes too short
Which can pursue the offender. How dost, my lord?

GLOUCESTER. O, madam, my old heart is crack'd, is crack'd!

REGAN. What, did my father's godson seek your life?
He whom my father nam'd? your Edgar?

GLOUCESTER. O, lady, lady, shame would have it hid!

REGAN. Was he not companion with the riotous knights
That tends upon my father?

GLOUCESTER. I know not, madam. 'T is too bad, too bad.

EDMUND. Yes, madam, he was of that consórt.²⁴

REGAN. No marvel, then, though he were ill affected:²⁵
'T is they have put him on²⁶ the old man's death,
To have th' expense²⁷ and waste of his revénues.
I have this present evening from my sister
Been well inform'd of them; and with such cautions,
That if they come to sojourn at my house,
I'll not be there.

CORNWALL. Nor I, assure thee, Regan.
Edmund, I hear that you have shown your father
A child-like²⁸ office.

EDMUND. 'T was my duty, sir.

GLOUCESTER. He did bewray²⁹ his practice; and receiv'd
This hurt you see, striving to apprehend him.

CORNWALL. Is he pursued?

GLOUCESTER. Ay, my good lord.

CORNWALL. If he be taken, he shall never more
Be fear'd of doing harm. Make your own purpose,
How in my strength³⁰ you please. For you, Edmund,
Whose virtue and obedience doth this instant
So much command itself, you shall be ours.
Natures of such deep trust we shall much need;
You we first seize on.

EDMUND. I shall serve you, sir,
Truly, however else.

GLOUCESTER. For him I thank your Grace.

CORNWALL. You know not why we came to visit you,—

REGAN. Thus out of season, threading³¹ dark-ey'd night?
Occasions, noble Gloucester, of some poise,³²
Wherein we must have use of your advice.
Our father he hath writ, so hath our sister,

²³ capable—i.e., legitimate. ²⁴ consórt—gang. ²⁵ ill affected—disloyal.
on—incited him to. ²⁷ expense—spending. ²⁸ child-like—dutiful.
reveal. ³⁰ strength—authority. ³¹ threading—traveling through.

²⁶ put him
²⁹ bewray—
³² poise—im-

Of differences, which I best thought it fit
To answer from³³ our home; the several messengers
From hence attend³⁴ dispatch. Our good old friend,
Lay comforts to your bosom; and bestow
Your needful counsel to our business,
Which craves the instant use.

 GLOUCESTER. I serve you, madam.
Your Graces are right welcome. [*Exeunt. Flourish.*]

ACT II · 2

Before Gloucester's castle.

[*Enter KENT and the Steward OSWALD, meeting.*]

OSWALD. Good dawning to thee, friend. Art of this house?

KENT. Ay.

OSWALD. Where may we set our horses?

KENT. I' th' mire.

OSWALD. Prithee, if you lov'st me, tell me.

KENT. I love thee not.

OSWALD. Why, then, I care not for thee.

KENT. If I had thee in Lipsbury pinfold,¹ I would make thee care for me.

OSWALD. Why dost thou use me thus? I know thee not.

KENT. Fellow, I know thee.

OSWALD. What dost thou know me for?

KENT. A knave; a rascal; an eater of broken meats;² a base, proud, shallow, beggarly, three-suited, hundred-pound, filthy, worsted-stocking knave; a lily-livered, action-taking³ knave; a whoreson, glass-gazing, super-serviceable, finical rogue; one-trunk-inheriting⁴ slave; one that wouldst be a bawd, in way of good service, and art nothing but the composition⁵ of a knave, beggar, coward, pandar, and the son and heir of a mongrel bitch; one whom I will beat into clamorous whining, if thou deni'st the least syllable of thy addition.

OSWALD. Why, what a monstrous fellow art thou, thus to rail on one that is neither known of thee nor knows thee!

KENT. What a brazen-faced varlet art thou, to deny thou knowest me! Is it two days since I tripped up thy heels, and beat thee before the King? Draw, you rogue; for, though it be night, yet the moon shines. I'll make a sop o' th' moonshine⁶ of you, you whoreson cullionly⁷ barber-monger!⁸ Draw! [*Drawing his sword.*]

OSWALD. Away! I have nothing to do with thee.

KENT. Draw, you rascal! You come with letters against the King; and take Vanity the puppet's part against the royalty of her father. Draw, you rogue, or I'll so carbonado⁹ your shanks,—draw, you rascal! Come your ways.

³³ from—away from. ³⁴ attend—await.

¹ Lipsbury pinfold—between my jaws (?). ² broken meats—left-overs, food for the lower servants. ³ action-taking—going to law instead of fighting for his rights. ⁴ one-trunk-inheriting—one trunk will hold all his possessions. ⁵ composition—combination.

⁶ sop o' th' moonshine—mess (?). ⁷ cullionly—vile. ⁸ barber-monger—fop.

⁹ carbonado—slice (into steaks).

OSWALD. Help, ho! murder! help!

KENT. Strike, you slave! Stand, rogue, stand! You neat slave, strike.
[Beating him.]

OSWALD. Help, ho! murder! murder!

[Enter EDMUND with his rapier drawn, CORNWALL, REGAN, GLOUCESTER, and Servants.]

EDMUND. How now! What's the matter?

KENT. With you, goodman boy, an you please: come, I'll flesh¹⁰ ye; come on, young master.

GLOUCESTER. Weapons! arms! What's the matter here?

CORNWALL. Keep peace, upon your lives!
He dies that strikes again. What is the matter?

REGAN. The messengers from our sister and the King.

CORNWALL. What is your difference? Speak.

OSWALD. I am scarce in breath, my lord.

KENT. No marvel, you have so bestirred your valour. You cowardly rascal. Nature disclaims in thee. A tailor made thee.

CORNWALL. Thou art a strange fellow: a tailor make a man?

KENT. A tailor, sir. A stone-cutter¹¹ or a painter could not have made him so ill, though they had been but two hours at the trade.

CORNWALL. Speak yet, how grew your quarrel?

OSWALD. This ancient ruffian, sir, whose life I have spared at suit of his grey beard,—

KENT. Thou whoreson zed!¹² thou unnecessary letter! My lord, if you will give me leave, I will tread this unbolted¹³ villain into mortar, and daub the wall of a jakes¹⁴ with him.

Spare my grey beard, you wagtail?

CORNWALL. Peace, sirrah!

You beastly knave, know you no reverence?

KENT. Yes, sir; but anger hath a privilege.

CORNWALL. Why art thou angry?

KENT. That such a slave as this should wear a sword,
Who wears no honesty. Such smiling rogues as these,
Like rats, oft bite the holy cords¹⁵ a-twain
Which are too intrinse t' unloose; smooth¹⁶ every passion
That in the natures of their lords rebel;
Bring oil to fire, snow to their colder moods;
Renege, affirm, and turn their halcyon¹⁷ beaks
With every gale and vary of their masters,
Knowing nought, like dogs, but following.
A plague upon your epileptic visage!
Smile you my speeches, as I were a fool?
Goose, an I had you upon Sarum¹⁸ Plain,
I'd drive ye cackling home to Camelot.¹⁹

CORNWALL. What, art thou mad, old fellow?

GLOUCESTER. How fell you out? Say that.

¹⁰ flesh—initiate you to fighting.

¹¹ stone-cutter—sculptor.

¹² zed—the letter Z.

¹³ unbolted—coarse.

¹⁴ jakes—privy.

¹⁵ holy cords—bonds of natural affection.

¹⁶ smooth—encourage.

¹⁷ halcyon—the king-fisher, supposed to be a natural weather-

vane.

¹⁸ Sarum—Salisbury.

¹⁹ Camelot—site of King Arthur's court.

KENT. No contraries hold more antipathy
Than I and such a knave.

CORNWALL. Why dost thou call him knave? What is his fault?

KENT. His countenance likes²⁰ me not.

CORNWALL. No more, perchance, does mine, nor his, nor hers.

KENT. Sir, 't is my occupation to be plain;
I have seen better faces in my time
Than stands on any shoulder that I see
Before me at this instant.

CORNWALL. This is some fellow
Who, having been prais'd for bluntness, doth affect
A saucy roughness, and constrains²¹ the garb
Quite from his nature. He cannot flatter, he;
An honest mind and plain, he must speak truth!
An they will take it, so; if not, he's plain.
These kind of knaves I know, which in this plainness
Harbour more craft and more corrupter ends
Than twenty silly ducking óbservants²²
That stretch their duties nicely.²³

KENT. Sir, in good sooth, in sincere verity,
Under th' allowance of your great aspéct,
Whose influence, like the wreath of radiant fire
On flickering Phoebus' front,²⁴—

CORNWALL. What mean'st by this?

KENT. To go out of my dialect, which you discommend so much. I know,
sir, I am no flatterer. He that beguiled you in a plain accent was a plain knave;
which for my part I will not be, though I should win your displeasure to entreat
me to 't.

CORNWALL. What was th' offence you gave him?

OSWALD. I never gave him any.
It pleas'd the King his master very late
To strike at me, upon his misconstruction;²⁵
When he, conjunct, and flattering his displeasure,
Tripp'd me behind; being down, insulted, rail'd,
And put upon him such a deal of man
That worthied him,²⁶ got praises of the King
For him attempting who was self-subdued;²⁷
And, in the fleshment²⁸ of this dread exploit,
Drew on me here again.

KENT. None of these rogues and cowards
But Ajax²⁹ is their fool.³⁰

CORNWALL. Fetch forth the stocks!
You stubborn ancient knave, you reverend braggart,
We'll teach you—

KENT. Sir, I am too old to learn.

²⁰ likes—pleases.

²¹ constrains—puts on.

²² óbservants—obsequious parasites.

²³ nicely—punctiliously.

²⁴ Phoebus' front—sun's forehead.

²⁵ upon his misconstruction—because of a misunderstanding.

²⁶ worthied him—won him favor.

²⁷ was self-

subdued—made no resistance.

²⁸ fleshment—excitement.

²⁹ Ajax—the famous Greek braggart warrior.

³⁰ their fool—inferior to them.

Call not your stocks for me; I serve the King,
On whose employment I was sent to you.
You shall do small respects, show too bold malice
Against the grace and person of my master,
Stocking his messenger.

CORNWALL. Fetch forth the stocks! As I have life and honour,
There shall he sit till noon.

REGAN. Till noon! Till night, my lord; and all night too.

KENT. Why, madam, if I were your father's dog,
You should not use me so.

REGAN. Sir, being his knave, I will.
[*Stocks brought out.*]

CORNWALL. This is a fellow of the self-same colour
Our sister speaks of. Come, bring away the stocks!

GLOUCESTER. Let me beseech your Grace not to do so.
His fault is much, and the good King his master
Will check³¹ him for 't. Your purpos'd low correction
Is such as basest and contemn'd'st wretches
For pilferings and most common trespasses
Are punish'd with. The King must take it ill
That he, so slightly valued in his messenger,
Should have him thus restrained.

CORNWALL. I'll answer that.

REGAN. My sister may receive it much more worse
To have her gentleman abus'd, assaulted,
For following her affairs. Put in his legs. [KENT is put in the stocks.]
Come, my good lord, away. [*Exeunt all but GLOUCESTER and KENT.*]

GLOUCESTER. I am sorry for thee, friend; 't is the Duke's pleasure,
Whose disposition, all the world well knows,
Will not be rubb'd nor stopp'd. I'll entreat for thee.

KENT. Pray, do not, sir. I have watch'd³² and travell'd hard;
Some time I shall sleep out, the rest I'll whistle.
A good man's fortune may grow out at heels.
Give you good morrow!

GLOUCESTER. The Duke's to blame in this; 't will be ill took. [*Exit.*]

KENT. Good King, that must approve the common saw,³³
Thou out of heaven's benediction com'st
To the warm sun!

Approach, thou beacon³⁴ to this under globe,
That by thy comfortable beams I may
Peruse this letter! Nothing almost sees miracles
But misery. I know 't is from Cordelia,
Who hath most fortunately been inform'd
Of my obscured³⁵ course; [*Reads.*] "—and shall find time
From this enormous state³⁶—seeking to give
Losses their remedies."—All weary and o'erwatch'd,

³¹ check—rebuke. ³² watch'd—gone without sleep. ³³ saw—saying. ³⁴ beacon—
rising sun. ³⁵ obscured—in disguise. ³⁶ this enormous state—these evil times.

Take vantage,³⁷ heavy eyes, not to behold
This shameful lodging.
Fortune, good-night! Smile once more; turn thy wheel!³⁸ [*Sleeps.*]

ACT II · 3

Near Gloucester's castle.

[*Enter* EDGAR.]

EDGAR. I heard myself proclaim'd;
And by the happy hollow of a tree
Escap'd the hunt. No port is free; no place
That guard and most unusual vigilance
Does not attend my taking.¹ Whiles I may scape
I will preserve myself, and am bethought
To take the basest and most poorest shape
That ever penury,² in contempt³ of man,
Brought near to beast. My face I'll grime with filth,
Blanket my loins, elf⁴ all my hairs in knots,
And with presented⁵ nakedness out-face
The winds and persecutions of the sky.
The country gives me proof and precedent⁶
Of Bedlam⁷ beggars, who, with roaring voices,
Strike in their numb'd and mortified bare arms
Pins, wooden pricks, nails, sprigs of rosemary;
And with this horrible object, from low farms,
Poor pelting⁸ villages, sheep-cotes, and mills,
Sometimes with lunatic bans,⁹ sometimes with prayers,
Enforce their charity. "Poor Turlygod!¹⁰ poor Tom!"
There's something yet. Edgar I nothing¹¹ am. [*Exit.*]

ACT II · 4

Gloucester's castle. Kent in the stocks.

[*Enter* LEAR, FOOL, and GENTLEMAN.]

LEAR. 'T is strange that they should so depart from home,
And not send back my messenger.

³⁷ vantage—advantage of drowsiness. ³⁸ wheel—i.e., the wheel, turned by the goddess Fortune, on which all men were bound to rise and fall.

¹ attend my taking—await my capture. ² penury—poverty. ³ in contempt—to show the worthlessness. ⁴ elf—mat. ⁵ presented—exposed. ⁶ proof and precedent—

examples. ⁷ Bedlam—from Bethlehem Hospital for lunatics. ⁸ pelting—insignificant.

⁹ bans—curses. ¹⁰ "Poor Turlygod!"—the bedlam's cry. ¹¹ nothing—as good as dead.

GENTLEMAN. As I learn'd,
The night before there was no purpose in them
Of this remove.

KENT. Hail to thee, noble master!

LEAR. Ha!

Mak'st thou this shame thy pastime?

KENT. No, my lord.

FOOL. Ha, ha! he wears cruel garters. Horses are tied by the heads, dogs and bears by the neck, monkeys by the loins, and men by the legs. When a man's over-lusty at legs,¹ then he wears wooden nether-stocks.²

LEAR. What's he that hath so much thy place³ mistook
To set thee here?

KENT. It is both he and she;
Your son and daughter.

LEAR. No.

KENT. Yes.

LEAR. No, I say.

KENT. I say, yea.

LEAR. No, no, they would not.

KENT. Yes, they have.

LEAR. By Jupiter, I swear, no.

KENT. By Juno,⁴ I swear, ay.

LEAR. They durst not do 't;
They could not, would not do 't. 'T is worse than murder,
To do upon respect⁵ such violent outrage.
Resolve⁶ me, with all modest⁷ haste, which way
Thou mightst deserve, or they impose, this usage,
Coming from us.

KENT. My lord, when at their home
I did commend⁸ your Highness' letters to them,
Ere I was risen from the place that show'd
My duty kneeling, came there a reeking post,
Stew'd in his haste, half breathless, panting forth
From Goneril his mistress salutations;
Deliver'd letters, spite of intermission,⁹
Which presently, they read. On whose contents,
They summon'd up their meiny,¹⁰ straight took horse;
Commanded me to follow, and attend
The leisure of their answer; gave me cold looks:
And meeting here the other messenger,
Whose welcome, I perceiv'd, had poison'd mine,—
Being the very fellow which of late
Display'd¹¹ so saucily against your Highness,—
Having more man than wit about me, drew:
He rais'd the house with loud and coward cries.

¹ over-lusty at legs—a vagabond.

² nether-stocks—stockings.

³ place—position.

⁴ Juno—queen of the gods.

⁵ upon respect—against the respect due a king.

⁶ Re-

solve—inform.

⁷ modest—moderate.

⁸ commend—deliver.

⁹ spite of intermis-

sion—in spite of interrupting me.

¹⁰ meiny—attendants.

¹¹ Display'd—acted.

Your son and daughter found this trespass worth¹²

The shame which here it suffers.

FOOL. Winter's¹³ not gone yet, if the wild geese fly that way.

Fathers that wear rags

Do make their children blind;

But fathers that bear bags¹⁴

Shall see their children kind.

Fortune, that arrant whore,

Ne'er turns the key¹⁵ to the poor.

But, for all this, thou shalt have as many dolours¹⁶ for thy daughters as thou canst tell¹⁷ in a year.

LEAR. O, how this mother¹⁸ swells up toward my heart!

Hysterica passio, down, thou climbing sorrow,

Thy element¹⁹'s below!—Where is this daughter?

KENT. With the Earl, sir; here within.

LEAR.

Follow me not; stay here. [*Exit.*]

GENTLEMAN. Made you no more offence but what you speak of?

KENT. None.

How chance the King comes with so small a number?

FOOL. An thou hadst been set i' th' stocks for that question, thou hadst well deserv'd it.

KENT. Why, Fool?

FOOL. We'll set thee to school to an ant, to teach thee there's no labouring i' th' winter. All that follow their noses are led by their eyes but blind men; and there's not a nose among twenty but can smell him that's stinking. Let go thy hold when a great wheel runs down a hill, lest it break thy neck with following; but the great one that goes upward, let him draw thee after. When a wise man gives thee better counsel, give me mine again; I would have none but knaves follow it, since a fool gives it.

That sir which serves and seeks for gain,

And follows but for form,

Will pack²⁰ when it begins to rain,

And leave thee in the storm.

But I will tarry; the Fool will stay,

And let the wise man fly.

The knave turns fool that runs away;

The Fool no knave, perdy.²¹

[*Enter LEAR and GLOUCESTER.*]

KENT. Where learn'd you this, Fool?

FOOL. Not i' th' stocks, fool.

LEAR. Deny to speak with me! They are sick? They are weary?

They have travell'd all the night? Mere fetches,²²

The images²³ of revolt and flying off.

Fetch me a better answer.

¹² worth—deserving of.
the key—admits.

¹³ Winter's—trouble's.

¹⁴ bags—moneybags.

¹⁵ turns

¹⁶ dolours—griefs, with a pun on "dollars."

¹⁷ tell—count.

¹⁸ mother—hysteria (*hysterica passio*).

¹⁹ element—proper place.

²⁰ pack—desert.

²¹ perdy—by God.

²² fetches—pretexts.

²³ images—signs.

GLOUCESTER. My dear lord,
You know the fiery quality of the Duke;
How unremovable and fix'd he is
In his own course.

LEAR. Vengeance! plague! death! confusion!
Fiery! What quality? Why, Gloucester, Gloucester,
I'd speak with the Duke of Cornwall and his wife.

GLOUCESTER. Well, my good lord, I have inform'd them so.

LEAR. Inform'd them! Dost thou understand me, man?

GLOUCESTER. Ay, my good lord.

LEAR. The King would speak with Cornwall; the dear father
Would with his daughter speak, commands her service.
Are they inform'd of this? My breath and blood!
Fiery? The fiery duke? Tell the hot duke that—
No, but not yet; may be he is not well.
Infirmity doth still neglect all office²⁴
Whereto our health is bound; we are not ourselves
When nature, being oppress'd, commands the mind
To suffer with the body. I'll forbear;
And am fallen out²⁵ with my more headier will,²⁶
To take the indispos'd and sickly fit
For the sound man.—Death on my state! wherefore [*looking on KENT*]
Should he sit here? This act persuades me
That this remotion²⁷ of the Duke and her
Is practice only. Give me my servant forth.²⁸
Go tell the Duke and 's wife I'd speak with them,
Now, presently. Bid them come forth and hear me,
Or at their chamber-door I'll beat the drum
Till it cry sleep to death.²⁹

GLOUCESTER. I would have all well betwixt you. [*Exit.*]

LEAR. O me, my heart, my rising heart! But, down!

FOOL. Cry to it, nuncle, as the cockney did to the eels when she put 'em
i' th' paste³⁰ alive; she knapped 'em o' th' coxcombs³¹ with a stick, and cried,
"Down, wantons, down!" 'T was her brother that, in pure kindness to his horse,
buttered his hay.

[*Enter CORNWALL, REGAN, GLOUCESTER, and Servants.*]

LEAR. Good morrow to you both.

CORNWALL. Hail to your Grace!

[*KENT here set at liberty.*]

REGAN. I am glad to see your Highness.

LEAR. Regan, I think you are; I know what reason
I have to think so. If thou shouldst not be glad,
I would divorce me from thy mother's tomb,
Sepulchring an adultress. [*To KENT.*] O, are you free?
Some other time for that. Beloved Regan,

²⁴ office—duty. ²⁵ fallen out—angry. ²⁶ more headier will—hastiness. ²⁷ remo-
tion—keeping away from me. ²⁸ Give me my servant forth—release my servant.
²⁹ cry sleep to death—make sleep impossible. ³⁰ paste—pastry crust. ³¹ knapped
'em o' th' coxcombs—rapped them on the heads.

Thy sister's naught.³² O Regan, she hath tied
Sharp-tooth'd unkindness, like a vulture, here. [*Points to his heart.*]
I can scarce speak to thee; thou 'lt not believe
With how deprav'd a quality—O Regan!

REGAN. I pray you, sir, take patience. I have hope
You less know how to value her desert
Than she to scant³³ her duty.

LEAR. Say, how is that?

REGAN. I cannot think my sister in the least
Would fail her obligation. If, sir, perchance
She have restrain'd the riots of your followers,
'T is on such ground, and to such wholesome end,
As clears her from all blame.

LEAR. My curses on her!

REGAN. O, sir, you are old;
Nature in you stands on the very verge
Of her confine.³⁴ You should be rul'd and led
By some discretion that discerns your state³⁵
Better than you yourself. Therefore, I pray you,
That to our sister you do make return;
Say you have wrong'd her, sir.

LEAR. Ask her forgiveness?

Do you but mark how this becomes the house:³⁶
"Dear daughter, I confess that I am old; [*Kneeling.*]
Age is unnecessary.³⁷ On my knees I beg,
That you'll vouchsafe me raiment, bed, and food."

REGAN. Good sir, no more; these are unsightly tricks.
Return you to my sister.

LEAR [*rising*]. Never, Regan:

She hath abated me of half my train;
Look'd black upon me; struck me with her tongue,
Most serpent-like, upon the very heart.
All the stor'd vengeance of heaven fall
On her ingrateful top!³⁸ Strike her young bones,
You taking³⁹ airs, with lameness!

CORNWALL. Fie, sir, fie!

LEAR. You nimble lightnings, dart your blinding flames
Into her scornful eyes! Infect her beauty,
You fen-suck'd fogs, drawn by the powerful sun,
To fall⁴⁰ and blast her pride!

REGAN. O the blest gods! so will you wish on me,
When the rash mood is on.

LEAR. No, Regan, thou shalt never have my curse.
Thy tender-hefted⁴¹ nature shall not give
Thee o'er to harshness. Her eyes are fierce; but thine

³² naught—wicked.

condition of mind.

useless.

³³ scant—fall short in.

³⁶ the house—royal family.

³⁸ top—head.

³⁹ taking—infectious.

³⁴ confine—boundary.

³⁷ Age is unnecessary—the old are

⁴⁰ fall—humble.

⁴¹ tender-

Do comfort and not burn. 'T is not in thee
To grudge my pleasures, to cut off my train,
To bandy hasty words, to scant my sizes,⁴²
And in conclusion to oppose the bolt⁴³
Against my coming in. Thou better know'st
The offices⁴⁴ of nature, bond of childhood,
Effects of courtesy, dues of gratitude.
Thy half o' th' kingdom hast thou not forgot,
Wherein I thee endow'd.

REGAN. Good sir, to the purpose. [*Tucket within.*]

LEAR. Who put my man i' th' stocks?

[*Enter OSWALD.*]

CORNWALL. What trumpet's that?

REGAN. I know 't; my sister's. This approves her letter,
That she would soon be here. [*To OSWALD.*] Is your lady come?

LEAR. This is a slave whose easy-borrowed pride⁴⁵
Dwells in the fickle grace of her he follows.
Out, varlet,⁴⁶ from my sight!

CORNWALL. What means your Grace?

[*Enter GONERIL.*]

LEAR. Who stock'd my servant? Regan, I have good hope
Thou didst not know on 't. Who comes here? O heavens,
If you do love old men, if your sweet sway
Allow⁴⁷ obedience, if you yourselves are old,
Make it your cause; send down, and take my part!
[*To GONERIL.*] Art not asham'd to look upon this beard?
O Regan, wilt thou take her by the hand?

GONERIL. Why not by the hand, sir? How have I offended?
All's not offence that indiscretion finds
And dotage terms so.

LEAR. O sides, you are too tough;
Will you yet hold? How came my man i' th' stocks?

CORNWALL. I set him there, sir; but his own disorders
Deserv'd much less advancement.

LEAR. You! did you?

REGAN. I pray you, father, being weak, seem so.
If, till the expiration of your month,
You will return and sojourn with my sister,
Dismissing half your train, come then to me.
I am now from home, and out of⁴⁸ that provision
Which shall be needful for your entertainment.

LEAR. Return to her, and fifty men dismiss'd!
No, rather I abjure all roofs, and choose
To wage against the enmity o' the air;
To be a comrade with the wolf and owl,—
Necessity's sharp pinch. Return with her?

⁴² sizes—allowances. ⁴³ oppose the bolt—bar the door. ⁴⁴ offices—duties. ⁴⁵ easy-borrowed pride—vanity. ⁴⁶ varlet—low fellow. ⁴⁷ Allow—approve. ⁴⁸ out of—lack.

Why, the hot-blooded France, that dowerless took
Our youngest born, I could as well be brought
To knee his throne, and, squire-like, pension beg
To keep base life afoot. Return with her?
Persuade me rather to be slave and sumpter⁴⁹
To this detested groom. [*Pointing at OSWALD.*]

CONERIL. At your choice, sir.

LEAR. I prithee, daughter, do not make me mad;
I will not trouble thee, my child; farewell!
We'll no more meet, no more see one another
But yet thou art my flesh, my blood, my daughter;
Or rather a disease that's in my flesh,
Which I must needs call mine; thou art a boil,
A plague-sore, an embossed⁵⁰ carbuncle,
In my corrupted blood. But I'll not chide thee;
Let shame come when it will, I do not call it.
I do not bid the thunder-bearer⁵¹ shoot,
Nor tell tales of thee to high-judging⁵² Jove.
Mend when thou canst; be better at thy leisure.
I can be patient; I can stay with Regan,
I and my hundred knights.

REGAN. Not altogether so;
I look'd not for you yet, nor am provided
For your fit welcome. Give ear, sir, to my sister;
For those that mingle reason with your passion⁵³
Must be content to think you old, and so—
But she knows what she does.

LEAR. Is this well spoken?

REGAN. I dare avouch it, sir. What, fifty followers!
Is it not well?⁵⁴ What should you need of more?
Yea, or so many, sith that both charge⁵⁵ and danger
Speak 'gainst so great a number? How, in one house,
Should many people, under two commands,
Hold amity? 'T is hard; almost impossible.

CONERIL. Why might not you, my lord, receive attendance
From those that she calls servants or from mine?

REGAN. Why not, my lord? If then they chanc'd to slack⁵⁶ ye,
We could control them. If you will come to me,—
For now I spy a danger—I entreat you
To bring but five and twenty; to no more
Will I give place or notice.

LEAR. I gave you all.

REGAN. And in good time you gave it.

LEAR. Made you my guardians, my depositaries;

⁴⁹ sumpter—pack horse.

⁵⁰ embossed—swollen.

⁵¹ thunder-bearer—Jupiter.

⁵² high-judging—almighty.

⁵³ mingle reason with your passion—consider your anger

from a reasonable point of view.

⁵⁴ well—enough.

⁵⁵ charge—expense.

⁵⁶ slack

—neglect.

But kept a reservation⁵⁷ to be followed
With such a number. What, must I come to you
With five and twenty, Regan? Said you so?

REGAN. And speak 't again, my lord; no more with me.

LEAR. Those wicked creatures yet do look well-favour'd⁵⁸
When others are more wicked; not being the worst
Stands in some rank of praise. [*To GONERIL.*] I'll go with thee.
Thy fifty yet doth double five and twenty,
And thou art twice her love.

GONERIL. Hear me, my lord:
What need you five and twenty, ten, or five,
To follow⁵⁹ in a house where twice so many
Have a command to tend you?

REGAN. What need one?

LEAR. O, reason not the need! Our basest beggars
Are in the poorest thing superfluous.⁶⁰
Allow not nature more than nature needs,
Man's life is cheap as beast's. Thou art a lady;
If only to go warm were gorgeous,
Why, nature needs not what thou gorgeous wear'st,
Which scarcely keeps thee warm. But, for true need,—
You heavens, give me that patience, patience I need!
You see me here, you gods, a poor old man,
As full of grief as age; wretched in both!
If it be you that stir these daughters' hearts
Against their father, fool⁶¹ me not so much
To bear it tamely; touch me with noble anger,
And let not women's weapons, water-drops,
Stain my man's cheeks! No, you unnatural hags,
I will have such revenges on you both
That all the world shall—I will do such things,—
What they are, yet I know not; but they shall be
The terrors of the earth. You think I'll weep:
No, I'll not weep.
I have full cause of weeping; but this heart [*Storm and tempest.*]
Shall break into a hundred thousand flaws,⁶²
Or ere⁶³ I'll weep. O, Fool! I shall go mad!

[*Exeunt LEAR, GLOUCESTER, KENT, and FOOL.*]

CORNWALL. Let us withdraw, 't will be a storm.

REGAN. This house is little: the old man and 's people
Cannot be well bestow'd.

GONERIL. 'T is his own blame; hath put himself from rest,
And must needs taste his folly.

REGAN. For his particular,⁶⁴ I'll receive him gladly,
But not one follower.

⁵⁷ reservation—condition.

⁵⁸ well-favour'd—handsome.

⁵⁹ follow—attend you.

⁶⁰ are . . . superfluous—have more than is absolutely necessary.

⁶¹ fool—degrade.

⁶² flaws—bits.

⁶³ Or ere—before.

⁶⁴ particular—himself alone.

GONERIL. So am I purpos'd.
Where is my Lord of Gloucester?

[Enter GLOUCESTER.]

CORNWALL. Followed the old man forth. He is return'd.

GLOUCESTER. The King is in high rage.

CORNWALL. Whither is he going?

GLOUCESTER. He calls to horse; but will I know not whither.

CORNWALL. 'T is best to give him way; he leads himself.

GONERIL. My lord, entreat him by no means to stay.

GLOUCESTER. Alack, the night comes on, and the bleak winds
Do sorely ruffle;⁶⁵ for many miles about
There's scarce a bush.

REGAN. O, sir, to wilful men,
The injuries that they themselves procure
Must be their schoolmasters. Shut up your doors.
He is attended with a desperate train;
And what they may incense⁶⁶ him to, being apt
To have his ear abus'd,⁶⁷ wisdom bids fear.

CORNWALL. Shut up your doors, my lord; 't is a wild night:
My Regan counsels well: come out o' th' storm. [*Exeunt.*]

ACT III · 1

A heath.

[*Storm still. Enter KENT and a GENTLEMAN, meeting.*]

KENT. Who's there, besides foul weather?

GENTLEMAN. One minded like the weather, most unquietly.

KENT. I know you. Where's the King?

GENTLEMAN. Contending with the fretful elements;
Bids the wind blow the earth into the sea,
Or swell the curled waters 'bove the main,¹
That things might change or cease; tears his white hair,
Which the impetuous blasts, with eyeless² rage,
Catch in their fury, and make nothing of;
Strives in his little world of man to out-scorn
The to-and-fro-conflicting wind and rain.
This night, wherein the cub-drawn³ bear would couch,⁴
The lion and the belly-pinched wolf
Keep their fur dry, unbonneted he runs,
And bids what will take all.

KENT. But who is with him?

⁶⁵ ruffle—rage.

⁶⁶ incense—instigate.

⁶⁷ abus'd—deceived.

¹ main—land.

² eyeless—blind.

³ cub-drawn—sucked dry.

⁴ couch—take shelter.

GENTLEMAN. None but the Fool; who labours to outjest
His heart-struck injuries.

KENT. Sir, I do know you;
And dare, upon the warrant of my note,
Commend a dear⁵ thing to you. There is division,
Although as yet the face of it be cover'd
With mutual cunning, 'twixt Albany and Cornwall;
Who have—as who have not, that their great stars
Thron'd and set high?—servants, who seem no less,
Which are to France the spies and speculations⁶
Intelligent⁷ of our state; what hath been seen,
Either in snuffs⁸ and packings⁹ of the Dukes,
Or the hard rein which both of them have borne
Against the old kind king, or something deeper,
Whereof perchance these are but furnishings¹⁰
But, true it is, from France there comes a power¹¹
Into this scattered¹² kingdom; who already,
Wise in our negligence, have secret feet
In some of our best ports, and are at point¹³
To show their open banner. Now to you:
If on my credit you dare build so far
To make your speed to Dover, you shall find
Some that will thank you, making just¹⁴ report
Of how unnatural and bemadding sorrow
The King hath cause to plain.
I am a gentleman of blood and breeding;
And, from some knowledge and assurance, offer
This office to you.

GENTLEMAN. I will talk further with you.

KENT. No, do not.

For confirmation that I am much more
Than my out-wall,¹⁵ open this purse, and take
What it contains. If you shall see Cordelia,—
As fear not but you shall,—show her this ring;
And she will tell you who your fellow is
That yet you do not know. Fie on this storm!
I will go seek the King.

GENTLEMAN. Give me your hand. Have you no more to say?

KENT. Few words, but, to effect,¹⁶ more than all yet;
That, when we have found the King,—in which your pain¹⁷
That way, I'll this,—he that first lights on him
Holla the other. [*Exeunt severally.*]

⁵ dear—important. ⁶ speculations—informers. ⁷ Intelligent—giving information.
⁸ snuffs—resentment. ⁹ packings—plottings. ¹⁰ furnishings—excuses. ¹¹ power
—army. ¹² scattered—divided. ¹³ at point—ready. ¹⁴ just—accurate. ¹⁵ out-
wall—appearance., i.e., in servant's livery. ¹⁶ to effect—in importance. ¹⁷ pain—
best efforts.

Another part of the heath. Storm still.

[*Enter LEAR and FOOL.*]

LEAR. Blow, winds, and crack your cheeks! Rage! Blow!
You cataracts and hurricanoes, spout
Till you have drench'd our steeples, drown'd the cocks!¹
You sulph'rous and thought-executing² fires,
Vaunt-couriers³ to oak-cleaving thunderbolts,
Singe my white head! And thou, all-shaking thunder,
Smite flat the thick rotundity o' th' world!
Crack nature's moulds, all germens⁴ spill⁵ at once,
That makes ingrateful man!

FOOL. O nuncle, court holy-water⁶ in a dry house is better than this rain-water out o' door. Good nuncle, in, and ask thy daughter's blessing. Here's a night pities neither wise man nor fool.

LEAR. Rumble thy bellyful! Spit, fire! Spout, rain!
Nor rain, wind, thunder, fire, are my daughters.
I tax⁷ not you, you elements, with unkindness,
I never gave you kingdom, call'd you children;
You owe me no subscription:⁸ then let fall
Your horrible pleasure. Here I stand, your slave,
A poor, infirm, weak, and despis'd old man;
But yet I call you servile ministers,⁹
That will with two pernicious daughters join
Your high-engender'd¹⁰ battles 'gainst a head
So old and white as this. Oh! Oh! 't is foul!

FOOL. He that has a house to put 's head in has a good head-piece.

The cod-piece that will house
Before the head has any,
The head and he shall louse;
So beggars marry many.
The man that makes his toe
What he his heart should make
Shall of a corn cry woe,
And turn his sleep to wake.

For there was never yet fair woman but she made mouths¹¹ in a glass.

[*Enter KENT.*]

LEAR. No, I will be the pattern of all patience; I will say nothing.

KENT. Who's there?

FOOL. Marry, here's grace and a cod-piece; that's a wise man and a fool.

KENT. Alas, sir, are you here? Things that love night

¹ cocks—weathervanes. ² thought-executing—killing as quick as thought. ³ Vaunt-couriers—forerunners. ⁴ germens—seeds of life. ⁵ spill—destroy. ⁶ court holy-water—flattery. ⁷ tax—accuse. ⁸ subscription—obedience. ⁹ ministers—agents. ¹⁰ high-engender'd—begotten on high. ¹¹ made mouths—grimaces.

Love not such nights as these; the wrathful skies
 Gallow¹² the very wanderers of the dark,
 And make them keep their caves. Since I was man,
 Such sheets of fire, such bursts of horrid thunder,
 Such groans of roaring wind and rain, I never
 Remember to have heard: man's nature cannot carry¹³
 Th' affliction nor the fear.

LEAR. Let the great gods,
 That keep this dreadful pudder¹⁴ o'er our heads,
 Find out their enemies now. Tremble, thou wretch,
 That hast within thee undivulged crimes,
 Unwhipp'd of justice; hide thee, thou bloody hand;
 Thou perjur'd, and thou simular¹⁵ man of virtue
 That art incestuous; caitiff, to pieces shake,
 That under covert and convenient seeming¹⁶
 Has practis'd on man's life; close pent-up guilts,
 Rive¹⁷ your concealing continents, and cry
 These dreadful summoners grace.¹⁸ I am a man
 More sinn'd against than sinning.

KENT. Alack, bare-headed!
 Gracious my lord, hard by here is a hovel;
 Some friendship will it lend you 'gainst the tempest.
 Repose you there; whilst I to this hard house—
 More harder than the stone whereof 't is rais'd;
 Which even but now, demanding after¹⁹ you.
 Deni'd²⁰ me to come in—return, and force
 Their scant courtesy.

LEAR. My wits begin to turn.
 Come on, my boy. How dost, my boy? Art cold?
 I am cold myself. Where is this straw, my fellow?
 The art of our necessities²¹ is strange,
 That can make vile things precious. Come, your hovel.
 Poor Fool and knave, I have one part in my heart
 That's sorry yet for thee.

FOOL [*singing*].

He that has and a little tiny wit,—
 With heigh-ho, the wind and the rain,—
 Must make content with his fortunes fit,
 For the rain it raineth every day.

LEAR. True, boy. Come, bring us to this hovel. [*Exeunt LEAR and KENT.*]

FOOL. This is a brave night to cool a courtesan.
 I'll speak a prophecy²² ere I go:

¹² Gallow—terrify. ¹³ carry—endure. ¹⁴ pudder—turmoil. ¹⁵ simular—hypocritical.
¹⁶ convenient seeming—mask of conventional virtue. ¹⁷ Rive—break out of.
¹⁸ grace—for mercy. ¹⁹ demanding after—inquiring for. ²⁰ Deni'd—forbade. ²¹ art
 of our necessities—skill created by need. ²² prophecy—what follows is a familiar Elizabethan “gag”: the Fool solemnly prophesies a number of absurd truisms.

When priests are more in word than matter;
 When brewers mar their malt with water;
 When nobles are their tailors' tutors;
 No heretics burn'd, but wenches' suitors;
 When every case in law is right;
 No squire in debt, nor no poor knight;
 When slanders do not live in tongues;
 Nor cutpurses come not to throngs;
 When usurers tell their gold i' th' field;
 And bawds and whores do churches build;
 Then shall the realm of Albion
 Come to great confusion.
 Then comes the time, who lives to see 't,
 That going shall be us'd with feet.

This prophecy Merlin shall make; for I live before his time. [*Exit.*]

ACT III · 3

Gloucester's castle.

[*Enter GLOUCESTER and EDMUND.*]

GLOUCESTER. Alack, alack, Edmund, I like not this unnatural dealing. When I desired their leave that I might pity him, they took from me the use of mine own house; charged me, on pain of their perpetual displeasure, neither to speak of him, entreat for him, nor any way sustain¹ him.

EDMUND. Most savage and unnatural!

GLOUCESTER. Go to; say you nothing. There is division between the Dukes, and a worse matter than that. I have received a letter this night; 't is dangerous to be spoken; I have locked the letter in my closet. These injuries the King now bears will be revenged home;² there is part of a power already footed;³ we must incline to the King. I will seek him, and privily relieve him. Go you and maintain talk with the Duke, that my charity be not of him perceived. If he ask for me, I am ill, and gone to bed. If I die for it, as no less is threatened me, the King my old master must be relieved. There is some strange thing toward, Edmund; pray you, be careful. [*Exit.*]

EDMUND. This courtesy, forbid⁴ thee, shall the Duke Instantly know; and of that letter too.

This seems a fair deserving,⁵ and must draw me

That which my father loses; no less than all.

The younger rises when the old doth fall. [*Exit.*]

¹ sustain—succour.
bidden to.

² home—to the utmost.

³ footed—landed.

⁴ forbid—for-

⁵ deserving—action which will deserve reward.

The heath. Before a hovel.

[*Enter LEAR, KENT, and FOOL.*]

KENT. Here is the place, my lord; good my lord, enter.
The tryanny of the open night's too rough
For nature to endure. [*Storm still.*]

LEAR. Let me alone.

KENT. Good my lord, enter here.

LEAR. Wilt break my heart?

KENT. I had rather break mine own. Good my lord, enter.

LEAR. Thou think'st 't is much that this contentious storm
Invades us to the skin; so 't is to thee;
But where the greater malady is fix'd,
The lesser is scarce felt. Thou 'dst shun a bear;
But if thy flight lay toward the roaring sea,
Thou 'dst meet the bear i' th' mouth. When the mind's free,¹
The body's delicate;² the tempest in my mind
Doth from my senses take all feeling else
Save what beats there. Filial ingratitude!
Is it not as this mouth should tear this hand
For lifting food to 't? But I will punish home:
No, I will weep no more. In such a night
To shut me out! Pour on; I will endure.
In such a night as this! O Regan, Goneril!
Your old kind father, whose frank heart gave all,—
O, that way madness lies; let me shun that;
No more of that.

KENT. Good my lord, enter here.

LEAR. Prithee, go in thyself; seek thine own ease.
This tempest will not give me leave to ponder
On things would hurt me more. But I'll go in.
[*To the FOOL.*] In, boy; go first. You houseless poverty,³—
Nay, get thee in. I'll pray, and then I'll sleep. [*Exit FOOL.*]
Poor naked wretches, wheresoe'er you are,
That bide the pelting of this pitiless storm,
How shall your houseless heads and unfed sides,
Your loop'd and window'd raggedness,⁴ defend you
From seasons such as these? O, I have ta'en
Too little care of this! Take physic,⁵ pomp,
Expose thyself to feel what wretches feel,
That thou mayst shake the superflux⁶ to them,
And show the heavens more just.

EDGAR [*within*]. Fathom and half, fathom and half! Poor Tom!

¹ free—untroubled.

² delicate—sensitive.

³ houseless poverty—homeless paupers.

⁴ loop'd and window'd raggedness—ragged clothing full of holes.

⁵ physic—medicine.

⁶ shake the superflux—give in charity what is superfluous.

[*The FOOL runs out from the hovel.*]

FOOL. Come not in here, nuncle, here's a spirit. Help me, help me!

KENT. Give me thy hand. Who's there?

FOOL. A spirit, a spirit! He says his name's poor Tom.

KENT. What art thou dost grumble there i' th' straw? Come forth.

[*Enter EDGAR, disguised as a madman.*]

EDGAR. Away! the foul fiend follows me! "Through the sharp hawthorn blow the winds." Hum! go to thy cold bed, and warm thee.

LEAR. Did'st thou give all to thy two daughters, and art thou come to this?

EDGAR. Who gives anything to poor Tom? whom the foul fiend hath led through fire and through flame, and through ford and whirlpool, o'er bog and quagmire; that hath laid knives under his pillow, and halters in his pew;⁷ set ratsbane⁸ by his porridge; made him proud of heart, to ride on a bay trotting-horse over four-inched⁹ bridges, to course¹⁰ his own shadow for a traitor. Bless thy five wits! Tom's a-cold,—O, do de, do de, do de. Bless thee from whirlwinds, star-blasting, and taking!¹¹ Do poor Tom some charity, whom the foul fiend vexes. There could I have¹² him now, and there, and there again, and there. [*Storm still.*]

LEAR. What, his daughters brought him to this pass? Couldst thou save nothing? Wouldst thou give 'em all?

FOOL. Nay, he reserved a blanket, else we had been all shamed.

LEAR. Now, all the plagues that in the pendulous air Hang fated o'er men's faults light on thy daughters!

KENT. He hath no daughters, sir.

LEAR. Death, traitor! nothing could have súbdu'd nature To such a lowness but his únkind daughters. Is it the fashion, that discarded fathers Should have thus little mercy on their flesh? Judicious punishment! 'T was this flesh begot Those pelican¹³ daughters.

EDGAR. Pillicock¹⁴ sat on Pillicock-hill. Alow, alow, loo, loo!

FOOL. This cold night will turn us all to fools and madmen.

EDGAR. Take heed o' th' foul fiend. Obey thy parents; keep thy word justly; swear not; commit not with man's sworn spouse; set not thy sweet heart on proud array. Tom's a-cold.

LEAR. What hast thou been?

EDGAR. A serving-man, proud in heart and mind; that curled my hair; wore gloves in my cap; served the lust of my mistress' heart, and did the act of darkness with her; swore as many oaths as I spake words, and broke them in the sweet face of heaven: one that slept in the contriving of lust, and waked to do it. Wine loved I deeply, dice dearly, and in woman out-paramoured the Turk:¹⁵ false of heart, light of ear, bloody of hand; hog in sloth, fox in stealth, wolf in greediness, dog in madness, lion in prey. Let not the creaking of shoes nor the rustling of silks betray¹⁶ thy poor heart to woman. Keep thy foot out of

⁷ pew—balcony.

⁸ ratsbane—poison.

⁹ four-inched—narrow.

¹⁰ course—chase.

¹¹ taking—infection.

¹² have—catch.

¹³ pelican—who feed on their mother's blood.

¹⁴ Pillicock, etc.—"pelican" reminds Poor Tom of an old nursery rhyme.

¹⁵ Turk—

Sultan. ¹⁶ betray—tempt you to give.

brothels, thy hand out of plackets,¹⁷ thy pen from lenders' books, and defy the foul fiend. [*Sings.*] "Still through the hawthorn blows the cold wind." Says suum, mun, nonny. Dolphin my boy, boy, sessa! let him trot by. [*Storm still.*]

LEAR. Why, thou wert better in thy grave than to answer with thy uncovered body this extremity of the skies. Is man no more than this? Consider him well. Thou ow'st the worm no silk, the beast no hide, the sheep no wool, the cat¹⁸ no perfume. Ha! here's three on's are sophisticated! Thou art the thing itself; unaccommodated man is no more but such a poor, bare, forked¹⁹ animal as thou art. Off, off, you lendings!²⁰ come, unbutton here.

[*Tearing off his clothes.*]

[*Enter GLOUCESTER, with a torch.*]

FOOL. Prithee, nuncle, be contented; 't is a naughty night to swim in. Now a little fire in a wild field were like an old leper's heart; a small spark, all the rest on 's body cold. Look, here comes a walking fire.

EDGAR. This is the foul fiend Flibbertigibbet; he begins at curfew, and walks till the first cock;²¹ he gives the web and the pin,²² squints the eye, and makes the hare-lip; mildews the white wheat, and hurts the poor creature of earth.

Swithold footed thrice the 'old;²³
He met the night-mare, and her ninefold;²⁴
Bid her alight,
And her troth plight,
And, aroint²⁵ thee, witch, aroint thee!

KENT. How far's your Grace?

LEAR. What's he?

KENT. Who's there? What is 't you seek?

GLOUCESTER. What are you there? Your names?

EDGAR. Poor Tom, that eats the swimming frog, the toad, the tadpole, the wall-newt,²⁶ and the water; that in the fury of his heart, when the foul fiend rages, eats cow-dung for salads; swallows the old rat and the ditchdog; drinks the green mantle of the standing pool; who is whipp'd from tithing²⁷ to tithing, and stocked, punished, and imprisoned; who hath had three suits to his back, six shirts to his body,

Horse to ride, and weapon to wear;
But mice and rats, and such small deer,²⁸
Have been Tom's food for seven long year.

Beware my follower. Peace, Smulkin; peace, thou fiend!

GLOUCESTER. What, hath your Grace no better company?

EDGAR. The prince of darkness is a gentleman. Modo he's call'd, and Mahu.

¹⁷ plackets—openings in petticoats.

¹⁸ cat—civet-cat.

¹⁹ forked—two-legged.

²⁰ lendings—clothes.

²¹ cock—cockcrow (midnight).

²² web and the pin—cataract

of the eye. ²³ 'old—wold, i.e., field.

²⁴ ninefold—nine colts.

²⁵ aroint—go away.

²⁶ wall-newt—lizard.

²⁷ tithing—district.

²⁸ deer—game.

GLoucester. Our flesh and blood, my lord, is grown so vile
That it doth hate what gets it.

EDGAR. Poor Tom's a-cold.

GLoucester. Go in with me; my duty cannot suffer
T' obey in all your daughters' hard commands.
Though their injunction be to bar my doors
And let this tyrannous night take hold upon you,
Yet have I ventur'd to come seek you out,
And bring you where both fire and food is ready.

LEAR. First let me talk with this philosopher.²⁹
What is the cause of thunder?

KENT. Good my lord, take his offer; go into the house.

LEAR. I'll talk a word with this same learned Theban.
What is your study?

EDGAR. How to prevent the fiend, and to kill vermin.

LEAR. Let me ask you one word in private.

KENT. Importune him once more to go, my lord;
His wits begin to unsettle.

GLoucester. Canst thou blame him? [*Storm still.*]
His daughters seek his death. Ah, that good Kent!
He said it would be thus, poor banish'd man!
Thou say'st the King grows mad; I'll tell thee, friend,
I am almost mad myself. I had a son,
Now outlaw'd from my blood; 'a sought my life,
But lately, very late. I lov'd him, friend,
No father his son dearer; true to tell thee,
The grief hath craz'd my wits. What a night's this!
I do beseech your Grace,—

LEAR. O, cry you mercy, sir.
Noble philosopher, your company.

EDGAR. Tom's a-cold.

GLoucester. In, fellow, there, into the hovel; keep thee warm.

LEAR. Come, let's in all.

KENT. This way, my lord.

LEAR. With him;

I will keep still with my philosopher.

KENT. Good my lord, soothe him; let him take the fellow.

GLoucester. Take him you on.

KENT. Sirrah, come on; go along with us.

LEAR. Come, good Athenian.

GLoucester. No words, no words: hush.

EDGAR.

Child³⁰ Rowland to the dark tower came;
His word was still, Fie, foh, and fum,
I smell the blood of a British man.

[*Exeunt.*]

²⁹ philosopher—scientist.

³⁰ child—candidate for knighthood.

ACT III • 5

Gloucester's castle.

[*Enter CORNWALL and EDMUND.*]

CORNWALL. I will have my revenge ere I depart his house.

EDMUND. How, my lord, I may be censured that nature¹ thus gives way to loyalty, something fears me to think of.

CORNWALL. I now perceive, it was not altogether your brother's evil disposition made him seek his death; but a provoking merit,² set a-work by a reproveable badness in himself.

EDMUND. How malicious is my fortune, that I must repent to be just! This is the letter he spoke of, which approves³ him an intelligent party⁴ to the advantages of France. O heavens! that this treason were not, or not I the detector!

CORNWALL. Go with me to the Duchess.

EDMUND. If the matter of this paper be certain, you have mighty business in hand.

CORNWALL. True or false, it hath made thee Earl of Gloucester. Seek out where thy father is, that he may be ready for our apprehension.⁵

EDMUND [*aside*]. If I find him comforting the King, it will stuff his suspicion more fully.—I will persevere in my course of loyalty, though the conflict be sore between that and my blood.

CORNWALL. I will lay trust upon thee; and thou shalt find a dearer father in my love. [*Exeunt.*]

ACT III • 6

A building attached to Gloucester's castle.

[*Enter KENT and GLOUCESTER.*]

GLOUCESTER. Here is better than the open air; take it thankfully. I will piece out the comfort with what addition I can. I will not be long from you.

KENT. All the power of his wits have given way to his impatience.¹ The gods reward your kindness! [*Exit GLOUCESTER.*]

[*Enter LEAR, EDGAR, and FOOL.*]

EDGAR. Frateretto calls me; and tells me Nero² is an angler in the lake of darkness.³ Pray, innocent, and beware the foul fiend.

FOOL. Prithee, nuncle, tell me whether a madman be a gentleman or a yeoman?

LEAR. A king, a king!

FOOL. No, he's a yeoman⁴ that has a gentleman to his son; for he's a mad

¹ nature—natural affection. ² provoking merit—a good quality that impelled him.

³ approves—reveals. ⁴ intelligent party—spy. ⁵ apprehension—arrest.

¹ impatience—suffering. ² Nero—the debauched emperor of Rome. ³ darkness—i.e., hell. ⁴ yeoman—property-holder.

yeoman that sees his son a gentleman before him.

LEAR. To have a thousand with red burning spits
Come hissing in upon 'em,—

EDGAR. The foul fiend bites my back.

FOOL. He's mad that trusts in the tameness of a wolf, a horse's health, a boy's love, or a whore's oath.

LEAR. It shall be done; I will arraign them straight.⁵

[To EDGAR.] Come, sit thou here, most learned justicer;

[To the FOOL.] Thou, sapient sir, sit here. Now, you she foxes!

EDGAR. Look, where he stands and glares!
Wantest thou eyes⁶ at trial, madam?

Come o'er the bourn,⁷ Bessy, to me,—

FOOL [*sings*].

Her boat hath a leak,
And she must not speak
Why she dares not come over to thee.

EDGAR. The foul fiend haunts poor Tom in the voice of a nightingale.
Hoppedance cries in Tom's belly for two white herring. Croak not, black angel;
I have no food for thee.

KENT. How do you, sir? Stand you not so amaz'd:⁸
Will you lie down and rest upon the cushion?

LEAR. I'll see their trial first. Bring in their evidence.
[To EDGAR.] Thou robed man of justice, take thy place;
[To the FOOL.] And thou, his yoke-fellow of equity,
Bench by his side. [To KENT.] You are o' th' commission,⁹
Sit you too.

EDGAR. Let us deal justly.

Sleepest or wakest thou, jolly shepherd?
Thy sheep be in the corn;
And for one blast of thy minikin¹⁰ mouth,
Thy sheep shall take no harm.

Purr! the cat is grey.

LEAR. Arraign her first; 't is Goneril. I here take my oath before this
honourable assembly, she kicked the poor king her father.

FOOL. Come hither, mistress. Is your name Goneril?

LEAR. She cannot deny it.

FOOL. Cry you mercy, I took you for a joint-stool.¹¹

LEAR. And here's another, whose warp'd looks proclaim
What store¹² her heart is made on. Stop her there!
Arms, arms, sword, fire! Corruption in the place!
False justicer, why hast thou let her scape?

EDGAR. Bless thy five wits!

⁵ straight—at once.

⁶ wantest thou eyes—do you wish spectators.

⁷ bourn—brook.

⁸ amaz'd—astonished.

⁹ commission—commissioned as a justice.

¹⁰ minikin—dainty.

¹¹ joint-stool—wooden stool.

¹² store—material.

KENT. O pity! Sir, where is the patience¹³ now
That you so oft have boasted to retain?

EDGAR [*aside*]. My tears begin to take his part so much,
They'll mar my counterfeiting.

LEAR. The little dogs and all,
Tray, Blanch, and Sweetheart, see, they bark at me.

EDGAR. Tom will throw his head at them. Avaunt, you curs!

Be thy mouth or black or white,
Tooth that poisons if it bite;
Mastiff, greyhound, mongrel grim,
Hound or spaniel, brach or lym,¹⁴
Or bobtail tike or trundle-tail,¹⁵
Tom will make him weep and wail,
For, with throwing thus my head,
Dogs leapt the hatch,¹⁶ and all fled.

Do de, de, de. Sessa! Come, march to wakes¹⁷ and fairs and market-towns. Poor
Tom, thy horn is dry.

LEAR. Then let them anatomize¹⁸ Regan; see what breeds about her
heart. Is there any cause in nature that make these hard hearts? [*To* EDGAR.]
You, sir, I entertain for one of my hundred; only I do not like the fashion of
your garments. You will say they are Persian attire, but let them be changed.

[*Enter* GLOUCESTER.]

KENT. Now, good my lord, lie here and rest a while.

LEAR. Make no noise, make no noise; draw the curtains; so, so, so. We'll
go to supper i' th' morning; so, so, so.

FOOL. And I'll go to bed at noon.

GLOUCESTER. Come hither, friend; where is the King my master?

KENT. Here, sir; but trouble him not, his wits are gone.

GLOUCESTER. Good friend, I prithee, take him in thy arms;
I have o'erheard a plot of death upon him.
There is a litter ready; lay him in 't,
And drive toward Dover, friend, where thou shalt meet
Both welcome and protection. Take up thy master.
If thou shouldst dally¹⁹ half an hour, his life,
With thine, and all that offer to defend him,
Stand in assured loss. Take up, take up;
And follow me, that will to some provision
Give thee quick conduct.

KENT. Oppressed nature sleeps.
This rest might yet have balm'd²⁰ thy broken sinews,
Which, if convenience will not allow,
Stand in hard cure.²¹ [*To the* FOOL.] Come, help to bear thy master;
Thou must not stay behind.

GLOUCESTER. Come, come, away. [*Exeunt all but* EDGAR.]

¹³ patience—self-control. ¹⁴ brach or lym—bitch or bloodhound. ¹⁵ trundle-tail—
drooping tail. ¹⁶ hatch—lower half of a divided door. ¹⁷ wakes—merrymakings.
¹⁸ anatomize—dissect. ¹⁹ dally—delay. ²⁰ balm'd—soothed. ²¹ stand in hard cure
—will hardly be cured.

EDGAR. When we our betters see bearing our woes,
 We scarcely think our miseries our foes.
 Who alone suffers,²² suffers most i' th' mind,
 Leaving free things and happy shows behind;
 But then the mind much sufferance doth o'erskip,
 When grief hath mates, and bearing fellowship.
 How light and portable my pain seems now,
 When that which makes me bend makes the King bow,
 He childed as I fathered! Tom, away!
 Mark the high noises;²³ and thyself bewray
 When false opinion, whose wrong thoughts defile thee,
 In thy just proof repeals and reconciles thee.
 What will hap more to-night, safe scape the King!
 Lurk, lurk.²⁴ [*Exit.*]

ACT III · 7

Gloucester's castle.

[*Enter CORNWALL, REGAN, GONERIL, EDMUND, and Servants.*]

CORNWALL [*to GONERIL*]. Post speedily to my lord your husband; show him this letter. The army of France is landed.—Seek out the traitor Gloucester.
 [*Exeunt some of the Servants.*]

REGAN. Hang him instantly.

GONERIL. Pluck out his eyes.

CORNWALL. Leave him to my displeasure.—Edmund, keep you our sister company; the revenges we are bound to take upon your traitorous father are not fit for your beholding. Advise the Duke, where you are going, to a most festinate¹ preparation; we are bound to the like. Our posts shall be swift and intelligent betwixt us. Farewell, dear sister; farewell, my lord of Gloucester. [*Enter OSWALD.*] How now! where's the King?

OSWALD. My Lord of Gloucester hath convey'd him hence.
 Some five or six and thirty of his knights,
 Hot questrists² after him, met him at gate,
 Who, with some other of the lords dependants,
 Are gone with him towards Dover, where they boast
 To have well-armed friends.

CORNWALL. Get horses for your mistress.

GONERIL. Farewell, sweet lord, and sister.

CORNWALL. Edmund, farewell. [*Exeunt GONERIL, EDMUND, and OSWALD.*]

Go seek the traitor Gloucester,
 Pinion him like a thief, bring him before us. [*Exeunt other Servants.*]
 Though well we may not pass upon his life

²² alone suffers—suffers by himself.

²⁴ Lurk, lurk—remain in hiding.

¹ festinate—speediest possible.

² questrists—searchers.

Without the form of justice, yet our power
Shall do a courtesy to our wrath, which men
May blame, but not control.

[Enter GLOUCESTER brought in by two or three Servants.]

Who's there? The traitor?

REGAN. Ingrateful fox! 't is he.

CORNWALL. Bind fast his corky³ arms.

GLOUCESTER. What means your Graces? Good my friends, consider
You are my guests. Do me no foul play, friends.

CORNWALL. Bind him, I say. [Servants bind him.]

REGAN. Hard, hard. O filthy traitor!

GLOUCESTER. Unmerciful lady as you are, I'm none.

CORNWALL. To this chair bind him. Villain, thou shalt find—

[REGAN plucks his beard.]

GLOUCESTER. By the kind gods, 't is most ignobly done
To pluck me by the beard.

REGAN. So white, and such a traitor!

GLOUCESTER. Naughty lady,
These hairs, which thou dost ravish from my chin,
Will quicken,⁴ and accuse thee. I am your host:
With robber's hands my hospitable favours
You should not ruffle⁵ thus. What will you do?

CORNWALL. Come, sir, what letters had you late from France?

REGAN. Be simple-answer'd, for we know the truth.

CORNWALL. And what confederacy have you with the traitors
Late footed in the kingdom?

REGAN. To whose hands you have sent the lunatic king?
Speak.

GLOUCESTER. I have a letter guessingly set down,
Which came from one that's of a neutral heart,
And not from one oppos'd.

CORNWALL. Cunning.

REGAN. And false.

CORNWALL. Where hast thou sent the King?

GLOUCESTER. To Dover.

REGAN. Wherefore to Dover? Wast thou not charg'd at peril—

CORNWALL. Wherefore to Dover? Let him answer that.

GLOUCESTER. I am tied to th' stake, and I must stand the course.⁶

REGAN. Wherefore to Dover?

GLOUCESTER. Because I would not see thy cruel nails
Pluck out his poor old eyes; nor thy fierce sister
In his anointed flesh stick boarish fangs.
The sea, with such a storm as his bare head
In hell-black night endur'd, would have buoy'd⁷ up
And quench'd the stelled fires;⁸
Yet, poor old heart, he holp⁹ the heavens to rain.

³ corky—withered.

⁴ quicken—come to life.

⁵ ruffle—violate.

⁶ course—attack.

⁷ buoy'd—swelled up.

⁸ stelled fires—light of the stars.

⁹ holp—helped.

If wolves had at thy gate howl'd that stern time,
Thou shouldst have said, "Good porter, turn the key."
All cruels else subscrib'd:¹⁰ but I shall see
The winged vengeance overtake such children.

CORNWALL. See 't shalt thou never. Fellows, hold the chair.

Upon these eyes of thine I'll set my foot.

GLOUCESTER. He that will think to live till he be old,

Give me some help!—O cruel! O ye gods!

REGAN. One side will mock another; th' other too.

CORNWALL. If you see vengeance,—

FIRST SERVANT. Hold your hand, my lord!

I have serv'd you ever since I was a child;

But better service have I never done you

Than now to bid you hold.

REGAN. How now, you dog!

FIRST SERVANT. If you did wear a beard upon your chin,
I'd shake it on this quarrel. What do you mean?

CORNWALL. My villain!¹¹ [*They draw and fight.*]

FIRST SERVANT. Nay, then, come on, and take the chance of anger.

REGAN. Give me thy sword. A peasant stand up thus?

[*She takes a sword, and runs at him behind.*]

FIRST SERVANT. Oh, I am slain! My lord, you have one eye left
To see some mischief on him. Oh! [*Dies.*]

CORNWALL. Lest it see more, prevent it. Out, vile jelly!
Where is thy lustre now?

GLOUCESTER. All dark and comfortless. Where's my son Edmund?
Edmund, enkindle all the sparks of nature,
To quit¹² this horrid act.

REGAN. Out, treacherous villain!
Thou call'st on him that hates thee. It was he
That made the overture¹³ of thy treason to us,
Who is too good to pity thee.

GLOUCESTER. O my follies! then Edgar was abus'd¹⁴
Kind gods, forgive me that, and prosper him!

REGAN. Go thrust him out at gates, and let him smell
His way to Dover.

[*Exit one with GLOUCESTER.*]

How is 't, my lord? How look you?

CORNWALL. I have received a hurt; follow me, lady.
Turn out that eyeless villain; throw this slave
Upon the dunghill. Regan, I bleed apace;
Untimely comes this hurt. Give me your arm. [*Exit CORNWALL, led by REGAN.*]

SECOND SERVANT. I'll never care what wickedness I do,
If this man come to good.

THIRD SERVANT. If she live long,

¹⁰ cruels else subscribed—other cruel animals submitted. ¹¹ villain—servant. ¹² quit
—requite. ¹³ overture—disclosure. ¹⁴ abus'd—wronged.

And in the end meet the old course¹⁵ of death,
Women will all turn monsters.

SECOND SERVANT. Let's follow the old earl, and get the Bedlam
To lead him where he would: his roguish madness
Allows itself to anything.

THIRD SERVANT. Go thou: I'll fetch some flax and whites of eggs
To apply to his bleeding face. Now, Heaven help him! [*Exeunt severally.*]

ACT IV · 1

The open country near Gloucester's castle.

[*Enter EDGAR.*]

EDGAR. Yet better thus, and known to be contemn'd,¹
Than, still contemn'd and flatter'd, to be worst.
The lowest and most dejected thing of fortune
Stands still in esperance,² lives not in fear.
The lamentable change is from the best;
The worst returns³ to laughter. Welcome, then,
Thou unsubstantial air that I embrace!
The wretch that thou hast blown unto the worst
Owes nothing to thy blasts.

[*Enter GLOUCESTER, led by an OLD MAN.*]

But who comes here?
My father, poorly led? World, world, O world!
But that thy strange mutations make us hate thee,
Life would not yield to age.⁴

OLD MAN. O, my good lord, I have been your tenant, and your father's
tenant, these four-score years.

GLOUCESTER. Away, get thee away! Good friend, be gone;
Thy comforts can do me no good at all;
Thee they may hurt.

OLD MAN. Alack, sir, you cannot see your way.

GLOUCESTER. I have no way, and therefore want no eyes;
I stumbled when I saw. Full oft 't is seen,
Our means secure⁵ us, and our mere defects
Prove our commodities.⁶ Ah! dear son Edgar,
The food⁷ of thy abused father's wrath!
Might I but live to see thee in my touch,
I'd say I had eyes again!

OLD MAN. How now! Who's there?

EDGAR [*aside*]. O gods! Who is 't can say, "I am at the worst"?
I am worse than e'er I was.

¹⁵ old course—natural death in old age.

¹ contemn'd—despised.

² esperance—hope.

³ returns—can only change to.

⁴ yield

to age—consent to live.

⁵ secure—make

careless.

⁶ commodities—advantages.

⁷ food—object.

OLD MAN. 'T is poor mad Tom.
 EDGAR [*aside*]. And worse I may be yet; the worst is not
 So long as we can say, "This is the worst."
 OLD MAN. Fellow, where goest?
 GLOUCESTER. Is it a beggar-man?
 OLD MAN. Madman and beggar too.
 GLOUCESTER. He has some reason, else he could not beg.
 I' th' last night's storm I such a fellow saw,
 Which made me think a man a worm. My son
 Came then into my mind, and yet my mind
 Was then scarce friends with him. I have heard more since.
 As flies to wanton⁸ boys, are we to the gods,
 They kill us for their sport.
 EDGAR [*aside*]. How should this be?
 Bad is the trade that must play fool to sorrow,⁹
 Ang'ring itself and others.—Bless thee, master!
 GLOUCESTER. Is that the naked fellow?
 OLD MAN. Ay, my lord.
 GLOUCESTER. Then, prithee, get thee gone. If, for my sake,
 Thou wilt o'ertake us, hence a mile or twain
 I' th' way toward Dover, do it for ancient love;
 And bring some covering for this naked soul,
 Who I'll entreat to lead me.
 OLD MAN. Alack, sir, he is mad.
 GLOUCESTER. 'T is the time's plague,¹⁰ when madmen lead the blind.
 Do as I bid thee, or rather do thy pleasure;
 Above the rest, be gone.
 OLD MAN. I'll bring him the best 'parel that I have,
 Come on 't what will. [*Exit.*]
 GLOUCESTER. Sirrah, naked fellow,—
 EDGAR. Poor Tom's a-cold. [*Aside.*] I cannot daub¹¹ it further—
 GLOUCESTER. Come hither, fellow.
 EDGAR [*aside*]. And yet I must.—Bless thy sweet eyes, they bleed.
 GLOUCESTER. Know'st thou the way to Dover?
 EDGAR. Both stile and gate, horse-way and foot-path. Poor Tom hath been
 scared out of his wits. Bless thee, good man's son, from the foul fiend! Five
 fiends have been in poor Tom at once; of lust, as Obdicut; Hobbididence,
 prince of dumbness; Mahu, of stealing; Modo, of murder; Flibbertigibbet, of
 mopping and mowing,¹² who since possesses chambermaids and waiting-women.
 So, bless thee, master!
 GLOUCESTER. Here, take this purse, thou whom the heavens' plagues
 Have humbled to all strokes:¹³ that I am wretched
 Makes thee the happier; heavens, deal so still!
 Let the superfluous and lust-dieted man,
 That slaves¹⁴ your ordinance,¹⁵ that will not see

⁸ wanton—playful. ⁹ sorrow—to one in sorrowful plight. ¹⁰ time's plague—a symbol
 of these bad times. ¹¹ daub—pretend. ¹² mopping and mowing—face making.
¹³ to all strokes—to be able to endure all misfortunes. ¹⁴ slaves—subordinates to his
 desires. ¹⁵ ordinance—commands.

Because he does not feel, feel your power quickly;
So distribution should undo excess,
And each man have enough. Dost thou know Dover?

EDGAR. Ay, master.

GLOUCESTER. There is a cliff, whose high and bending head
Looks fearfully in the confined deep.
Bring me but to the very brim of it,
And I'll repair the misery thou dost bear
With something rich about me. From that place
I shall no leading need.

EDGAR. Give my thy arm;
Poor Tom shall lead thee. [*Exeunt.*]

ACT IV • 2

Before the Duke of Albany's palace.

[*Enter GONERIL, EDMUND, and OSWALD.*]

GONERIL. Welcome, my lord! I marvel our mild husband
Not met us on the way.—Now, where's your master?

OSWALD. Madam, within; but never man so chang'd.
I told him of the army that was landed;
He smil'd at it: I told him you were coming;
His answer was, "The worse:" of Gloucester's treachery,
And of the loyal service of his son,
When I inform'd him, then he call'd me sot,¹
And told me I had turn'd the wrong side out.
What most he should dislike seems pleasant to him;
What like, offensive.

GONERIL [*To EDMUND*]. Then shall you go no further.
It is the cowish² terror of his spirit,
That dares not undertake; he'll not feel wrongs
Which tie³ him to an answer. Our wishes on the way
May prove effects.⁴ Back, Edmund, to my brother;
Hasten his musters and conduct his powers.
I must change arms at home, and give the distaff⁵
Into my husband's hands. This trusty servant
Shall pass between us. Ere long you are like to hear,
If you dare venture in your own behalf,
A mistress's command. Wear this; spare speech;
Decline your head. This kiss, if it durst speak,
Would stretch thy spirits up into the air.
Conceive,⁶ and fare thee well.

¹ sot—fool.

² cowish—cowardly.

³ tie—force.

⁴ prove effects—be fulfilled.

⁵ distaff—spinning staff, i.e., symbol of woman's place.
meaning.

⁶ Conceive—understand my

EDMUND. Your's in the ranks of death. [*Exit.*]

GONERIL.

My most dear Gloucester!

O, the difference of man and man!
To thee a woman's services are due;
My Fool usurps my body.

OSWALD.

Madam, here comes my lord. [*Exit.*]

[*Enter the DUKE OF ALBANY.*]

GONERIL. I have been worth the whistle.

ALBANY.

O Goneril!

You are not worth the dust which the rude wind
Blows in your face. I fear your disposition.
That nature which contemns its origin
Cannot be border'd certain⁷ in itself.
She that herself will sliver and disbranch
From her material sap,⁸ perforce must wither
And come to deadly use.⁹

GONERIL. No more; the text is foolish.

ALBANY. Wisdom and goodness to the vile seem vile;
Filths savour but themselves. What have you done?
Tigers, not daughters, what have you perform'd?
A father, and a gracious aged man,
Whose reverence even the head-lugg'd¹⁰ bear would lick,
Most barbarous, most degenerate! have you madded.
Could my good brother suffer you to do it?
A man, a prince, by him so benefited!
If that the heavens do not their visible spirits
Send quickly down to tame¹¹ these vile offences,
It will come,
Humanity must perforce prey on itself,
Like monsters of the deep.

GONERIL.

Milk-liver'd man!

That bear'st a cheek for blows, a head for wrongs,
Who hast not in thy brows an eye discerning
Thine honour from thy suffering, that not know'st
Fools do those villains pity who are punish'd
Ere they have done their mischief; where's thy drum?
France spreads his banners in our noiseless¹² land,
With plumed helm thy state begins to threat;
Whiles thou, a moral fool, sits still, and criest,
"Alack, why does he so?"

ALBANY.

See thyself, devil!

Proper¹³ deformity seems not in the fiend
So horrid as in woman.

⁷ be border'd certain—have sure boundaries of conduct.
use—destruction.

¹⁰ head-lugg'd—led by a leash.

¹³ Proper—natural to a fiend.

⁸ sap—i.e., trunk.
¹¹ tame—put a stop to.

⁹ deadly
¹² noise-

GONERIL. O vain fool!

ALBANY. Thou changed and self-cover'd¹⁴ thing, for shame!
Be-monster not thy feature. Were 't my fitness
To let these hands obey my blood,
They are apt enough to dislocate and tear
Thy flesh and bones; howe'er thou art a fiend,
A woman's shape doth shield thee.

GONERIL. Marry, your manhood—Mew!

[Enter a MESSENGER.]

ALBANY. What news?

MESSENGER. O, my good lord, the Duke of Cornwall's dead;
Slain by his servant, going to put out
The other eye of Gloucester.

ALBANY. Gloucester's eyes!

MESSENGER. A servant that he bred, thrill'd with remorse,
Oppos'd against the act, bending his sword
To his great master; who, thereat enrag'd,
Flew on him, and amongst them fell'd him dead;
But not without that harmful stroke, which since
Hath pluck'd him after.

ALBANY. This shows you are above,
You justicers, that these our nether¹⁵ crimes
So speedily can venge! But, O poor Gloucester!
Lost he his other eye?

MESSENGER. Both, both, my lord.
This letter, madam, craves a speedy answer:
'T is from your sister.

GONERIL [aside]. One way I like this well;
But being widow, and my Gloucester with her,
May all the building in my fancy¹⁶ pluck¹⁷
Upon my hateful life: another way,
The news is not so tart. I'll read, and answer. [Exit.]

ALBANY. Where was his son when they did take his eyes?

MESSENGER. Come with my lady hither.

ALBANY. He is not here.

MESSENGER. No, my good lord; I met him back again.

ALBANY. Knows he the wickedness?

MESSENGER. Ay, my good lord; 't was he inform'd against him;
And quit the house on purpose, that their punishment
Might have the freer course.

ALBANY. Gloucester, I live
To thank thee for the love thou show'dst the King,
And to revenge thine eyes. Come hither, friend;
Tell me what more thou know'st. [Exeunt.]

¹⁴ self-cover'd—disguising your real nature. ¹⁵ nether—in this world.
my fancy—castle in the air. ¹⁷ pluck—pull down.

¹⁶ building in

The French camp near Dover.

[Enter KENT and a GENTLEMAN.]

KENT. Why the King of France is so suddenly gone back, know you no reason?

GENTLEMAN. Something he left imperfect in the state, which since his coming forth is thought of; which imports¹ to the kingdom so much fear and danger that his personal return was most required and necessary.

KENT. Who hath he left behind him General?

GENTLEMAN. The Marshal of France, Monsieur La Far.

KENT. Did your letters pierce the Queen to any demonstration of grief?

GENTLEMAN. Ay, sir; she took them, read them in my presence;
And now and then an ample tear trill'd down
Her delicate cheek. It seem'd she was a queen
Over her passion,² who, most rebel-like,
Sought to be king o'er her.

KENT. O, then it mov'd her.

GENTLEMAN. Not to a rage; patience and sorrow strove
Who should express her goodliest.³ You have seen
Sunshine and rain at once: her smiles and tears
Were like a better way; those happy smilets
That play'd on her ripe lip seem'd not to know
What guests were in her eyes, which, parted thence,
As pearls from diamonds dropp'd. In brief,
Sorrow would be a rarity⁴ most beloved,
If all could so become it.

KENT. Made she no verbal question?

GENTLEMAN. Faith, once or twice she heav'd the name of "father"
Pantingly forth, as if it press'd her heart;
Cried, "Sisters! sisters! Shame of ladies! sisters!
Kent! father! sisters! What, i' th' storm? i' th' night?
Let pity not be believ'd!" There she shook
The holy water from her heavenly eyes;
And clamour-moisten'd, then away she started
To deal with grief alone.

KENT. It is the stars,
The stars above us, govern our conditions;
Else one self mate and make⁵ could not beget
Such different issues.⁶ You spoke not with her since?

GENTLEMAN. No.

KENT. Was this before the King return'd?

GENTLEMAN. No, since.

¹ imports—threatens.
beautiful expression.
husband and wife.

² passion—sorrow.

⁴ rarity—something
⁶ issues—children.

³ express her goodliest—give her the more
precious. ⁵ self mate and make—same

KENT. Well, sir, the poor distressed Lear's i' th' town;
Who sometime, in his better tune, remembers
What we are come about, and by no means
Will yield to see his daughter.

GENTLEMAN. Why, good sir?

KENT. A sovereign shame so elbows⁷ him. His own unkindness,
That stripp'd her from his benediction, turn'd her
To foreign casualties,⁸ gave her dear rights
To his dog-hearted daughters,—these things sting
His mind so venomously, that burning shame
Detains him from Cordelia.

GENTLEMAN. Alack, poor gentleman!

KENT. Of Albany's and Cornwall's powers you heard not?

GENT. 'T is so, they are afoot.

KENT. Well, sir, I'll bring you to our master Lear,
And leave you to attend him. Some dear cause
Will in concealment wrap me up a while;
When I am known aright, you shall not grieve
Lending⁹ me this acquaintance. I pray you, go
Along with me. [*Exeunt.*]

ACT IV • 4

The same. A tent.

[*Enter, with drum and colours,*¹ CORDELIA, DOCTOR, and Soldiers.]

CORDELIA. Alack, 't is he! Why, he was met even now
As mad as the vex'd sea, singing aloud,
Crown'd with rank fumiter² and furrow-weeds,
With hardocks, hemlock, nettles, cuckoo-flowers,
Darnel, and all the idle weeds that grow
In our sustaining corn.³ A century⁴ send forth;
Search every acre in the high-grown field,
And bring him to our eye. [*Exit an Officer.*]

What can⁵ man's wisdom⁶
In the restoring his bereaved sense?
He that helps him take all my outward worth.

DOCTOR. There is means, madam.
Our foster-nurse of nature is repose,
The which he lacks; that to provoke in him,
Are many simples⁷ operative, whose power
Will close the eye of anguish.

⁷ elbows—stands at his side.

⁸ casualties—accidents.

⁹ Lending—affording.

¹ drum and colours—drummers and colour-bearers.

² fumiter, etc.—the names of wild

flowers and weeds.

³ sustaining corn—wheat that supports life.

⁴ century—a com-

pany of soldiers.

⁵ What can—what power is in.

⁶ man's wisdom—science.

⁷ simples—medicinal herbs.

CORDELIA. All blest secrets,
All you unpublish'd virtues of the earth,
Spring with my tears! be aidant and remediate⁸
In the good man's distress! Seek, seek for him,
Lest his ungovern'd rage dissolve the life
That wants the means⁹ to lead it.

[Enter MESSENGER.]

MESSENGER. News, madam!
The British powers are marching hitherward.
CORDELIA. 'T is known before; our preparation stands
In expectation of them. O dear father,
It is thy business that I go about;
Therefore great France
My mourning and important¹⁰ tears hath pitied.
No blown¹¹ ambition doth our arms incite,
But love, dear love, and our ag'd father's right.
Soon may I hear and see him! [Exeunt.]

ACT IV · 5

Gloucester's castle.

[Enter REGAN and OSWALD.]

REGAN. But are my brother's powers set forth?

OSWALD. Ay, madam.

REGAN. Himself in person there?

OSWALD. Madam, with much ado.¹

Your sister is the better soldier.

REGAN. Lord Edmund spake not with your lord at home?

OSWALD. No, madam.

REGAN. What might import my sister's letter to him?

OSWALD. I know not, lady.

REGAN. Faith, he is posted² hence on serious matter.

It was great ignorance, Gloucester's eyes being out,

To let him live; where he arrives he moves

All hearts against us. Edmund, I think, is gone,

In pity of his misery, to dispatch

His nighted³ life; moreover, to descry

The strength o' the enemy.

OSWALD. I must needs after him, madam, with my letter.

REGAN. Our troops set forth to-morrow, stay with us;
The ways are dangerous.

⁸ aidant and remediate—helpful remedies.
nate. ¹¹ blown—inflated.

⁹ means—sense.

¹⁰ important—importu-

¹ ado—effort.

² posted—ridden.

³ nighted—blinded.

OSWALD. I may not, madam:
My lady charg'd my duty in this business.
REGAN. Why should she write to Edmund? Might not you
Transport her purposes by word? Belike
Some thing—I know not what. I'll love thee much,
Let me unseal the letter.

OSWALD. Madam, I had rather—

REGAN. I know your lady does not love her husband;
I am sure of that; and at her late being here
She gave strange eliads⁴ and most speaking looks
To noble Edmund. I know you are of her bosom.⁵

OSWALD. I, madam?

REGAN. I speak in understanding; y' are, I know 't.
Therefore I do advise you, take this note:⁶
My lord is dead; Edmund and I have talk'd;
And more convenient is he for my hand
Than for your lady's. You may gather more.
If you do find him, pray you, give him this;
And when your mistress hears thus much from you,
I pray, desire her call her wisdom to her:
So, fare you well.
If you do chance to hear of that blind traitor,
Preferment⁷ falls on him that cuts him off.

OSWALD. Would I could meet him, madam! I would show
What party I do follow.

REGAN. Fare thee well. [*Exeunt.*]

ACT IV • 6

The country near Dover.

[*Enter GLOUCESTER, and EDGAR dressed like a peasant.*]

GLOUCESTER. When shall we come to th' top of that same hill?

EDGAR. You do climb up it now; look, how we labour.

GLOUCESTER. Methinks the ground is even.

EDGAR. Horrible steep.

Hark, do you hear the sea?

GLOUCESTER. No, truly.

EDGAR. Why, then, your other senses grow imperfect
By your eyes' anguish.

GLOUCESTER. So may it be, indeed.
Methinks thy voice is alter'd, and thou speak'st
In better phrase and matter than thou didst.

⁴ eliads—languishing looks. ⁵ of her bosom—in her confidence. ⁶ take this note—consider this. ⁷ Preferment—promotion.

EDGAR. You're much deceiv'd. In nothing am I chang'd
But in my garments.

GLOUCESTER. Methinks you're better spoken.

EDGAR. Come on, sir, here's the place; stand still. How fearful
And dizzy 't is, to cast one's eyes so low!
The crows and choughs¹ that wing the midway air
Show scarce so gross² as beetles. Half way down
Hangs one that gathers sampire,³ dreadful trade!
Methinks he seems no bigger than his head.
The fishermen, that walk upon the beach,
Appear like mice; and yond tall anchoring bark,
Diminish'd to her cock,⁴ her cock, a buoy
Almost too small for sight. The murmuring surge,
That on th' unnumber'd idle pebbles chafes,
Cannot be heard so high. I'll look no more,
Lest my brain turn, and the deficient sight⁵
Topple down headlong.

GLOUCESTER. Set me where you stand.

EDGAR. Give me your hand; you are now within a foot
Of th' éxtreme verge. For all beneath the moon
Would I not leap upright.

GLOUCESTER. Let go my hand.
Here, friend, 's another purse; in it a jewel
Well worth a poor man's taking. Fairies and gods
Prosper it with thee! Go thou further off;
Bid me farewell, and let me hear thee going.

EDGAR. Now fare you well, good sir.

GLOUCESTER. With all my heart.

EDGAR. Why I do trifle with his despair
Is done to cure it.

GLOUCESTER [*kneeling*]. O you mighty gods!
This world I do renounce, and in your sights
Shake patiently my great affliction off.
If I could bear it longer, and not fall
To quarrel with your great opposeless wills,
My snuff⁶ and loathed part of nature should
Burn itself out. If Edgar live, O bless him!
Now, fellow, fare thee well.

EDGAR. Gone, sir; farewell!
—And yet I know not how conceit⁷ may rob
The treasury of life, when life itself
Yields to the theft.

[GLOUCESTER *throws himself forward and falls on the stage floor.*]

Had he been where he thought,
By this had thought been past. Alive or dead?—

¹ choughs—jackdaws. ² gross—big. ³ sampire—aromatic plant, used as seasoning.
⁴ cock—cockboat. ⁵ deficient sight—failing sight. ⁶ snuff—useless remnant. ⁷ conceit—imagination.

Ho, you sir! friend! Hear you, sir! speak!—
Thus might he pass⁸ indeed; yet he revives.—
What are you, sir?

GLOUCESTER. Away, and let me die.

EDGAR. Hadst thou been aught but gossamer,⁹ feathers, air,
So many fathom down precipitating,
Thou'dst shiver'd like an egg: but thou dost breathe;
Hast heavy substance; bleed'st not; speak'st; art sound.
Ten masts at each¹⁰ make not the altitude
Which thou hast perpendicularly fell.
Thy life's a miracle. Speak yet again.

GLOUCESTER. But have I fall'n, or no?

EDGAR. From the dread summit of this chalky bourn.¹¹
Look up a-height; the shrill-gorg'd¹² lark so far
Cannot be seen or heard. Do but look up.

GLOUCESTER. Alack, I have no eyes.
Is wretchedness depriv'd that benefit,
To end itself by death? 'T was yet some comfort,
When misery could beguile¹³ the tyrant's rage,
And frustrate his proud will.

EDGAR. Give me your arm.
Up: so; How is 't? Feel your legs? You stand.

GLOUCESTER. Too well, too well.

EDGAR. This is above all strangeness.
Upon the crown o' th' cliff, what thing was that
Which parted from you?

GLOUCESTER. A poor unfortunate beggar.

EDGAR. As I stood here below, methought his eyes
Were two full moons; he had a thousand noses,
Horns whelk'd¹⁴ and waved like the enridged sea.
It was some fiend; therefore, thou happy father,¹⁵
Think that the clearest gods, who make them honours
Of men's impossibilities,¹⁶ have preserv'd thee.

GLOUCESTER. I do remember now. Henceforth I'll bear
Affliction till it do cry out itself,
"Enough, enough," and die. That thing you speak of,
I took it for a man; often would it say,
"The fiend, the fiend:" He led me to that place.

EDGAR. Bear free and patient thoughts.

[Enter LEAR, mad.]

But who comes here?

The safer sense¹⁷ will ne'er accommodate¹⁸
His master thus.

LEAR. No, they cannot touch me for coining; I am the King himself.

EDGAR. O thou side-piercing sight!

⁸ pass—die. ⁹ gossamer—spider's webbing. ¹⁰ at each—laid end to end. ¹¹ bourn
—boundary. ¹² gorg'd—throated. ¹³ beguile—elude. ¹⁴ whelk'd—twisted.
¹⁵ father—old man. ¹⁶ men's impossibilities—by doing things impossible to man.
¹⁷ safer sense—sane mind. ¹⁸ accommodate—dress up.

LEAR. Nature's above art in that respect. There's your press-money. That fellow handles his bow like a crow-keeper; draw me a clothier's yard.¹⁹ Look, look, a mouse! Peace, peace; this piece of toasted cheese will do 't. There's my gauntlet; I'll prove it on a giant. Bring up the brown bills.²⁰ O, well flown, bird! I' th' clout,²¹ i' th' clout! Hewgh! Give the word.²²

EDGAR. Sweet marjoram.

LEAR. Pass.

GLOUCESTER. I know that voice.

LEAR. Ha! Goneril, with a white beard! They flattered me like a dog, and told me I had white hairs in my beard ere the black ones were there. To say "ay" and "no" to everything I said! "Ay" and "no" too was no good divinity.²³ When the rain came to wet me once, and the wind to make me chatter; when the thunder would not peace at my bidding; there I found 'em, there I smelt 'em out. Go to, they are not men o' their words: they told me I was everything; 't is a lie, I am not agueproof.

GLOUCESTER. The trick of that voice I do well remember. Is 't not the King?

LEAR. Ay, every inch a king!
When I do stare, see how the subject quakes.
I pardon that man's life. What was thy cause?²⁴
Adultery?

Thou shalt not die. Die for adultery! No:
The wren goes to 't, and the small gilded fly
Does lecher in my sight.
Let copulation thrive; for Gloucester's bastard son
Was kinder to his father than my daughters
Got 'tween the lawful sheets.
To 't, luxury,²⁵ pell-mell! for I lack soldiers.
Behold yond simp'ring dame,
Whose face between her forks²⁶ presageth snow,²⁷
That minces virtue, and does shake the head
To hear of pleasure's name,—
The fitchew,²⁸ nor the soiled horse, goes to 't
With a more riotous appetite.
Down from the waist they are Centaurs,²⁹
Though women all above;
But to the girdle do the gods inherit,
Beneath is all the fiends';
There's hell, there's darkness, there's the sulphurous pit,
Burning, scalding, stench, consumption; fie, fie, fie! pah, pah!
Give me an ounce of civet, good apothecary, to sweeten my imagination.
There's money for thee.

GLOUCESTER. O, let me kiss that hand!

LEAR. Let me wipe it first; it smells of mortality.

¹⁹ clothier's yard—the length of an arrow. ²⁰ brown bills—halberds. ²¹ clout—bull's-eye. ²² word—password. ²³ no good divinity—false doctrine. ²⁴ cause—offense.
²⁵ luxury—lasciviousness. ²⁶ forks—part of the headdress. ²⁷ snow—chastity. ²⁸ fitchew—pole-cat. ²⁹ Centaurs—mythical beasts, half-man, half-horse.

GLOUCESTER. O ruin'd piece of nature! This great world
Shall so wear out to nought. Dost thou know me?

LEAR. I remember thine eyes well enough. Dost thou squiny³⁰ at me? No,
do thy worst, blind Cupid; I'll not love. Read thou this challenge; mark but the
penning of it.

GLOUCESTER. Were all thy letters suns, I could not see one.

EDGAR [*aside*]. I would not take³¹ this from report. It is;
And my heart breaks at it.

LEAR. Read.

GLOUCESTER. What, with the case³² of eyes?

LEAR. O, ho, are you there with me? No eyes in your head, nor no money
in your purse? Your eyes are in a heavy case, your purse in a light; yet you see
how this world goes.

GLOUCESTER. I see it feelingly.

LEAR. What, art mad? A man may see how this world goes with no eyes.
Look with thine ears; see how yond justice rails upon yond simple thief. Hark,
in thine ear: change places, and, handy-dandy,³³ which is the justice, which
is the thief? Thou hast seen a farmer's dog bark at a beggar?

GLOUCESTER. Ay, sir.

LEAR. And the creature run from the cur? There thou mightst behold
the great image of authority: a dog's obeyed in office.

Thou rascal beadle, hold thy bloody hand!

Why dost thou lash that whore? Strip thine own back;

Thou hotly lusts to use her in that kind³⁴

For which thou whip'st her. The usurer hangs the cozener.³⁵

Through tatter'd clothes small vices do appear;

Robes and furr'd gowns hides all. Plate sins with gold,

And the strong lance of justice hurtless breaks;

Arm it³⁶ in rags, a pigmy's straw does pierce it.

None does offend, none, I say, none; I'll able³⁷ 'em.

Take that of me, my friend, who have the power

To seal th' accuser's lips. Get thee glass eyes,

And, like a scurvy politician, seem

To see the things thou dost not. Now, now, now, now.

Pull off my boots; harder, harder: so.

EDGAR. O, matter and impertinency³⁸ mix'd;
Reason in madness!

LEAR. If thou wilt weep my fortune, take my eyes.

I know thee well enough; thy name is Gloucester.

Thou must be patient; we came crying hither.

Thou know'st, the first time that we smell the air,

We wawl and cry. I will preach to thee; mark.

GLOUCESTER. Alack, alack the day!

LEAR. When we are born, we cry that we are come
To this great stage of fools.—This a good block.³⁹

³⁰ squiny—squint. ³¹ take—believe. ³² case—sockets. ³³ handy-dandy—formula
in a child's game. ³⁴ kind—manner. ³⁵ cozener—petty cheat. ³⁶ it—sin.
³⁷ able—license. ³⁸ impertinency—incoherent talk. ³⁹ block—well-fashioned hat.

It were a delicate stratagem, to shoe
A troop of horse with felt, I'll put 't in proof;⁴⁰
And when I have stol'n upon these son-in-laws,
Then, kill, kill, kill, kill, kill, kill!

[Enter a GENTLEMAN with Attendants.]

GENTLEMAN. O, here he is! Lay hand upon him. Sir,
Your most dear daughter—

LEAR. No rescue? What, a prisoner? I am even
The natural fool⁴¹ of fortune. Use me well;
You shall have ransom. Let me have a surgeon;
I am cut to th' brains.

GENTLEMAN. You shall have anything.

LEAR. No seconds?⁴² All myself?
Why, this would make a man a man of salt,
To use his eyes for garden water-pots,
Ay, and laying autumn's dust.

GENTLEMAN. Good sir,—

LEAR. I will die bravely, like a smug bride groom. What!
I will be jovial. Come, come; I am a king,
My masters, know you that?

GENTLEMAN. You are a royal one, and we obey you.

LEAR. Then there's life in 't. Come, an you get it, you shall get it by
running. Sa, sa, sa, sa. [Exit running; Attendants follow.]

GENTLEMAN. A sight most pitiful in the meanest wretch,
Past speaking of in a king! Thou hast one daughter
Who redeems Nature from the general curse
Which twain have brought her to.

EDGAR. Hail, gentle sir.

GENTLEMAN. Sir, speed you: what's your will?

EDGAR. Do you hear aught, sir, of a battle toward?⁴³

GENTLEMAN. Most sure and vulgar;⁴⁴ every one hears that,
That can distinguish sound.

EDGAR. But, by your favour,
How near's the other army?

GENTLEMAN. Near and on speedy foot; the main descry
Stands on the hourly thought.

EDGAR. I thank you, sir; that's all.

GENTLEMAN. Though that the Queen on special cause is here,
Her army is mov'd on. [Exit.]

EDGAR. I thank you, sir.

GLOUCESTER. You ever-gentle gods, take my breath from me;
Let not my worser spirit tempt me again
To die before you please!

EDGAR. Well pray you, father.

GLOUCESTER. Now, good sir, what are you?

EDGAR. A most poor man, made tame⁴⁵ to fortune's blows;

⁴⁰ in proof—to trial. ⁴¹ natural fool—born to the sport of. ⁴² No seconds—no one
to aid me. ⁴³ toward—imminent. ⁴⁴ vulgar—commonly known. ⁴⁵ tame—sub-
missive.

Who, by the art of known and feeling sorrows,
Am pregnant⁴⁶ to good pity. Give me your hand,
I'll lead you to some biding.⁴⁷

 GLOUCESTER. Hearty thanks;
The bounty and the benison of Heaven
To boot, and boot!

 [Enter OSWALD.]

OSWALD. A proclaim'd prize! Most happy!⁴⁸
That eyeless head of thine was first fram'd flesh
To raise my fortunes. Thou old unhappy traitor,
Briefly thyself remember;⁴⁹ the sword is out
That must destroy thee.

 GLOUCESTER. Now let thy friendly hand
Put strength enough to 't. [EDGAR interposes.]

OSWALD. Wherefore, bold peasant,
Dar'st thou support a publish'd traitor? Hence;
Lest that th' infection of his fortune take
Like hold on thee. Let go his arm.

EDGAR. 'Chill⁵⁰ not let go, zir, without vurther 'casion.

OSWALD. Let go, slave, or thou diest!

EDGAR. Good gentleman, go your gait, and let poor volk pass. An 'chud ha'
bin zwaggered out of my life, 't would not ha' bin zo long as 't is by a vort-
night. Nay, come not near th' old man; keep out, 'che vor⁵¹ ye, or Ise try
whether your costard⁵² or my ballow⁵³ be the harder. 'Chill be plain with you.

OSWALD. Out, dunghill!

EDGAR. 'Chill pick your teeth, zir. Come, no matter vor your foins.⁵⁴

 [They fight, and EDGAR knocks him down.]

OSWALD. Slave, thou hast slain me. Villain, take my purse.
If ever thou wilt thrive, bury my body;
And give the letters which thou find'st about me
To Edmund Earl of Gloucester; seek him out
Upon the English party. O, untimely death!
Death! [Dies.]

EDGAR. I know thee well; a serviceable villain,
As duteous to the vices of thy mistress
As badness would desire.

 GLOUCESTER. What, is he dead?

EDGAR. Sit you down, father; rest you.
Let's see these pockets; the letters that he speaks of
May be my friends. He's dead; I am only sorry
He had no other death's-man.⁵⁵ Let us see.
Leave, gentle wax; and, manners, blame us not.
To know our enemies' minds, we'd rip their hearts;
Their papers, is more lawful. [Reads the letter.]

⁴⁶ pregnant—susceptible. ⁴⁷ biding—refuge.

member—prepare thy conscience for death.

dialect). ⁵¹ vor—warn. ⁵² costard—head.

⁵⁵ death's-man—executioner.

⁴⁸ happy—opportune.

⁴⁹ thyself re-

⁵⁰ 'Chill—I will (Edgar assumes a peasant

⁵³ ballow—cudgel.

⁵⁴ foins—thrusts.

Let our reciprocal vows be remembered. You have many opportunities to cut him off; if your will want not, time and place will be fruitfully offered. There is nothing done, if he return the conqueror; then am I the prisoner, and his bed my jail; from the loathed warmth whereof deliver me, and supply the place for your labour.

Your—wife, so I would say—

Affectionate servant,

GONERIL.

O indistinguish'd⁵⁶ space of woman's will!
A plot upon her virtuous husband's life;
And the exchange my brother! Here, in the sands,
Thee I'll rake up,⁵⁷ the post unsanctified
Of murderous lechers; and in the mature time
With this ungracious paper strike the sight
Of the death-practis'd⁵⁸ duke. For him 't is well
That of thy death and business I can tell.

GLOUCESTER. The King is mad; how stiff is my vile sense
That I stand up and have ingenious⁵⁹ feeling
Of my huge sorrows! Better I were distract;
So should my thoughts be sever'd from my griefs, [*Drum afar off.*]
And woes by wrong imaginations lose
The knowledge of themselves.

EDGAR.

Give me your hand.

Far off, methinks, I hear the beaten drum.
Come, father, I'll bestow you with a friend. [*Exeunt.*]

ACT IV · 7

A tent in the French camp.

[*Enter CORDELIA, KENT, and DOCTOR, and Gentleman.*]

CORDELIA. O thou good Kent, how shall I live and work
To match thy goodness? My life will be too short,
And every measure fail me.

KENT. To be acknowledg'd, madam, is o'erpaid.
All my reports go with¹ the modest truth;
Nor more nor clipp'd, but so.

CORDELIA. Be better suited;²
These weeds are memories of those worser hours.
I prithee, put them off.

KENT. Pardon, dear madam;
Yet to be known shortens³ my made intent.

⁵⁶ indistinguish'd—infinite.

⁵⁷ rake up—bury.

⁵⁸ death-practis'd—whose death is

plotted. ⁵⁹ ingenious—acute.

¹ go with—correspond to.

² suited—clothed.

³ shortens—cuts short.

My boon I make it, that you know me not
Till time and I think meet.

CORDELIA. Then be 't so, my good lord. [*To the DOCTOR.*] How does the King?

DOCTOR. Madam, sleeps still.

CORDELIA. O you kind gods,
Cure this great breach in his abused nature!
Th' untun'd and jarring senses, O, wind up
Of this child-changed father!

DOCTOR. So please your Majesty
That we may wake the King? He hath slept long.

CORDELIA. Be govern'd by your knowledge, and proceed
I' th' sway of your own will.

[*Enter LEAR in a chair carried by Servants.*]

Is he array'd?

DOCTOR. Ay, madam; in the heaviness of sleep
We put fresh garments on him.

GENTLEMAN. Good madam, be by, when we do awake him;
I doubt not of his temperance.⁴ [*Music.*]

CORDELIA. Very well.

DOCTOR. Please you, draw near.—Louder the music there!

CORDELIA. O my dear father! Restoration hang
Thy medicine on my lips; and let this kiss
Repair those violent harms that my two sisters
Have in thy reverence made!

KENT. Kind and dear princess!

CORDELIA. Had you not been their father, these white flakes⁵
Did challenge pity of them. Was this a face
To be oppos'd against the warring winds?
To stand against the deep dread-bolted thunder?
In the most terrible and nimble stroke
Of quick, cross lightning? to watch—poor perdu!⁶—
With this thin helm? Mine enemy's dog,
Though he had bit me, should have stood that night
Against my fire; and wast thou fain,⁷ poor father,
To hovel thee with swine and rogues forlorn
In short and musty straw? Alack, alack!
'T is wonder that thy life and wits at once
Had not concluded all. He wakes; speak to him.

DOCTOR. Madam, do you; 't is fittest.

CORDELIA. How does my royal lord? How fares your Majesty?

LEAR. You do me wrong to take me out o' th' grave.
Thou art a soul in bliss;⁸ but I am bound
Upon a wheel of fire, that mine own tears
Do scald like molten lead.

⁴ temperance—sanity.
⁸ bliss—Heaven.

⁵ flakes—hairs.

⁶ perdu—isolated sentry.

⁷ fain—glad.

CORDELIA. Sir, do you know me?

LEAR. You are a spirit, I know; when did you die?

CORDELIA. Still, still, far wide!⁹

DOCTOR. He's scarce awake; let him alone a while.

LEAR. Where have I been? Where am I? Fair daylight?

I am mightily abus'd. I should even die with pity,
To see another thus. I know not what to say.
I will not swear these are my hands. Let's see;
I feel this pin prick. Would I were assur'd
Of my condition!

CORDELIA. O, look upon me, sir.
And hold your hand in benediction o'er me.
No, sir, you must not kneel.

LEAR. Pray, do not mock me.
I am a very foolish fond old man.
Fourscore and upward, not an hour more nor less;
And, to deal plainly,
I fear I am not in my perfect mind.
Methinks I should know you, and know this man;
Yet I am doubtful; for I am mainly¹⁰ ignorant
What place this is, and all the skill I have
Remembers not these garments; nor I know not
Where I did lodge last night. Do not laugh at me;
For, as I am a man, I think this lady
To be my child Cordelia.

CORDELIA. And so I am, I am.

LEAR. Be your tears wet? Yes, faith. I pray, weep not.
If you have poison for me, I will drink it.
I know you do not love me; for your sisters
Have, as I do remember, done me wrong:
You have some cause, they have not.

CORDELIA. No cause, no cause.

LEAR. Am I in France?

KENT. In your own kingdom, sir.

LEAR. Do not abuse me.

DOCTOR. Be comforted, good madam; the great rage,
You see, is kill'd in him: and yet it is danger
To make him even o'er¹¹ the time he has lost.
Desire him to go in; trouble him no more
Till further settling.

CORDELIA. Will 't please your Highness walk?

LEAR. You must bear with me.

Pray you now, forget and forgive; I am old and foolish.

[*Exeunt all but KENT and GENTLEMAN.*]

GENTLEMAN. Holds it true, sir, that the Duke of Cornwall was so slain?

KENT. Most certain, sir.

GENTLEMAN. Who is conductor of his people?

⁹ wide—astray (in his wits). ¹⁰ mainly—completely. ¹¹ even o'er—recall past events.

KENT. As 't is said, the bastard son of Gloucester.

GENTLEMAN. They say Edgar, his banished son, is with the Earl of Kent in Germany.

KENT. Report is changeable.¹² 'T is time to look about; the powers of the kingdom approach apace.

GENTLEMAN. The arbitrement¹³ is like to be bloody. Fare you well, sir.
[Exit.]

KENT. My point¹⁴ and period will be thoroughly wrought,
Or well or ill, as this day's battle's fought. [Exit.]

ACT V · 1

The British camp, near Dover.

[Enter, with drum and colours, EDMUND, REGAN, Gentlemen, and Soldiers.]

EDMUND. Know of the Duke if his last purpose hold,
Or whether since he is advis'd by aught
To change the course. He's full of alteration
And self-reproving; bring his constant pleasure.¹

[To a Gentleman, who goes out.]

REGAN. Our sister's man is certainly miscarried.²

EDMUND. 'T is to be doubted,³ madam.

REGAN. Now, sweet lord,
You know the goodness I intend upon you.
Tell me—but truly—but then speak the truth,
Do you not love my sister?

EDMUND. In honour'd love.

REGAN. But have you never found my brother's way
To the forfended⁴ place?

EDMUND. That thought abuses you.

REGAN. I am doubtful that you have been conjunct
And bosom'd⁵ with her,—as far as we call hers.⁶

EDMUND. No, by mine honour, madam.

REGAN. I never shall endure her. Dear my lord,
Be not familiar with her.

EDMUND. Fear me not.
She and the Duke her husband!

[Enter, with drum and colours, ALBANY, CONERIL, and Soldiers.]

CONERIL [aside]. I had rather lose the battle than that sister
Should loosen him and me.

ALBANY. Our very loving sister, well be-met.
Sir, this I heard: the King is come to his daughter,

¹² Report is changeable—rumors are not reliable. ¹³ arbitrement—decision. ¹⁴ point—full stop.

¹ constant pleasure—final determination. ² miscarried—come to harm. ³ doubted—feared. ⁴ forfended—forbidden. ⁵ conjunct and bosom'd—intimate. ⁶ as far as we call hers—in every way.

With others whom the rigour of our state⁷
Forc'd to cry out. Where I could not be honest,
I never yet was valiant. For this business,
It toucheth us, as France invades our land,
Not bolds⁸ the King, with others, whom, I fear,
Most just and heavy causes make oppose.⁹

EDMUND. Sir, you speak nobly.

REGAN. Why is this reason'd?

GONERIL. Combine together 'gainst the enemy;
For these domestic and particular broils
Are not the question here.

ALBANY. Let's then determine
With the ancient¹⁰ of war on our proceeding.

EDMUND. I shall attend you presently at your tent.

REGAN. Sister, you'll go with us?

GONERIL. No.

REGAN. 'T is most convenient; pray you, go with us.

GONERIL [*aside*]. O, ho, I know the riddle. I will go.

[*Exeunt both the armies.*]

[*As they are going out, enter EDGAR disguised.*]

EDGAR. If e'er your Grace had speech with man so poor,
Hear me one word. [*ALBANY remains.*]

ALBANY. I'll overtake you.—Speak.

EDGAR. Before you fight the battle, ope this letter.
If you have victory, let the trumpet sound
For him that brought it. Wretched though I seem,
I can produce a champion that will prove
What is avouched there. If you miscarry,
Your business of the world hath so an end,
And machination ceases. Fortune love you!

ALBANY. Stay till I have read the letter.

EDGAR. I was forbid it.
When time shall serve, let but the herald cry,
And I'll appear again. [*Exit.*]

ALBANY. Why, fare thee well; I will o'erlook thy paper.
[*Re-enter EDMUND.*]

EDMUND. The enemy's in view; draw up your powers.
Here is the guess of their true strength and forces
By diligent discovery;¹¹ but your haste
Is now urg'd on you.

ALBANY. We will greet the time. [*Exit.*]

EDMUND. To both these sisters have I sworn my love;
Each jealous¹² of the other, as the stung
Are of the adder. Which of them shall I take?
Both? one? or neither? Neither can be enjoy'd,
If both remain alive. To take the widow

⁷ rigour of our state—our harsh government.

⁹ make oppose—make them oppose us.

⁸ Not bolds—not as it encourages.

¹⁰ ancient—veteran leaders.

¹¹ discovery—

scouting. ¹² jealous—suspicious.

Exasperates, makes mad her sister Goneril;
And hardly shall I carry out my side,
Her husband being alive. Now then we'll use
His countenance for the battle; which being done,
Let her that would be rid of him devise
His speedy taking off. As for the mercy
Which he intends to Lear and to Cordelia,
The battle done, and they within our power,
Shall never see his pardon; for my state
Stands on¹³ me to defend, not to debate. [*Exit.*]

ACT V · 2

A field between the two camps.

[*Alarum*¹ within. Enter, with drum and colours, LEAR, CORDELIA, and Soldiers, marching over the stage; and exeunt.]

[Enter EDGAR and GLOUCESTER.]

EDGAR. Here, father, take the shadow of this tree
For your good host; pray that the right may thrive.
If ever I return to you again,
I'll bring you comfort.

GLOUCESTER. Grace go with you, sir! [*Exit EDGAR.*]

[*Alarum and retreat sounded within. Re-enter EDGAR.*]

EDGAR. Away, old man; give me thy hand; away!
King Lear hath lost, he and his daughter ta'en.
Give me thy hand, come on.

GLOUCESTER. No further, sir; a man may rot even here.

EDGAR. What, in ill thoughts again? Men must endure
Their going hence, even as their coming hither;
Ripeness is all. Come on.

GLOUCESTER. And that's true too. [*Exeunt.*]

ACT V · 3

The British camp near Dover.

[Enter in conquest, with drum and colours, EDMUND; LEAR and CORDELIA as prisoners; CAPTAIN, Soldiers, etc.]

EDMUND. Some officers take them away. Good guard,
Until their greater pleasures first be known
That are to censure¹ them.

¹³ Stands on—requires.

¹ Alarum—summons to battle.

¹ censure—judge.

CORDELIA.

We are not the first

Who, with best meaning, have incurr'd the worst.
For thee, oppressed king, am I cast down;
Myself could else out-frown false Fortune's frown.
Shall we not see these daughters and these sisters?

LEAR. No, no, no, no! Come, let's away to prison;
We two alone will sing like birds i' th' cage.
When thou dost ask me blessing, I'll kneel down
And ask of thee forgiveness. So we'll live,
And pray, and sing, and tell old tales, and laugh
At gilded butterflies, and hear poor rogues
Talk of court news; and we'll talk with them too,
Who loses and who wins; who's in, who's out;
And take upon's² the mystery of things
As if we were God's spies;³ and we'll wear out,
In a wall'd prison, packs and sects of great ones,
That ebb and flow by the moon.

EDMUND.

Take them away.

LEAR. Upon such sacrifices, my Cordelia,
The gods themselves throw incense. Have I caught thee?
He that parts us shall bring a brand from heaven,
And fire us⁴ hence like foxes. Wipe thine eyes;
The good-years⁵ shall devour them, flesh and fell,
Ere they shall make us weep. We'll see 'em starve first.
Come. [*Exeunt LEAR and CORDELIA, guarded.*]

EDMUND. Come hither, captain; hark.

Take thou this note; [*Giving a paper.*] go follow them to prison.
One step I have advanc'd thee; if thou dost
As this instructs thee, thou dost make thy way
To noble fortunes. Know thou this, that men
Are as the time is; to be tender-minded
Does not become a sword. Thy great employment
Will not bear question; either say thou 'lt do 't,
Or thrive by other means.

CAPTAIN.

I'll do 't, my lord.

EDMUND. About it, and write happy when thou hast done.
Mark, I say, instantly; and carry⁶ it so
As I have set it down.

CAPTAIN. I cannot draw a cart, nor eat dried oats;
If it be man's work, I'll do 't. [*Exit.*]

[*Flourish. Enter ALBANY, GONERIL, REGAN, another CAPTAIN, and Soldiers.*]

ALBANY. Sir, you have show'd to-day your valiant strain,
And fortune led you well. You have the captives
Who were the opposites⁷ of this day's strife;
I do require them of you, so to use them

² take upon's—pretend to understand.
by fire. ⁵ good-years—pestilence.

³ God's spies—angels.

⁶ carry—execute.

⁴ fire us—drive us out
⁷ opposites—opponents.

As we shall find their merits and our safety
May equally determine.

EDMUND. Sir, I thought it fit
To send the old and miserable king
To some retention and appointed guard;
Whose age has charms in it, whose title more,
To pluck the common bosom⁸ on his side,
And turn our impress'd lances⁹ in our eyes
Which do command them. With him I sent the Queen,
My reason all the same; and they are ready
To-morrow, or at further space, t' appear
Where you shall hold your session. At this time
We sweat and bleed: the friend hath lost his friend;
And the best quarrels, in the heat, are curs'd
By those that feel their sharpness:
The question of Cordelia and her father
Requires a fitter place.

ALBANY. Sir, by your patience,
I hold you but a subject¹⁰ of this war,
Not as a brother.

REGAN. That's as we list to grace him.
Methinks our pleasure might have been demanded,
Ere you had spoke so far. He led our powers,
Bore the commission of my place and person;
The which immediacy¹¹ may well stand up,
And call itself your brother.

GONERIL. Not so hot.
In his own grace he doth exalt himself,
More than in your addition.

REGAN. In my rights,
By me invested, he compeers¹² the best.

ALBANY. That were the most, if he should husband you.

REGAN. Jesters do oft prove prophets.

GONERIL. Holla, holla!
That eye that told you so look'd but a-squint.

REGAN. Lady, I am not well; else I should answer
From a full-flowing¹³ stomach. General,
Take thou my soldiers, prisoners, patrimony;
Dispose of them, of me; the walls are thine.
Witness the world, that I create thee here
My lord and master.

GONERIL. Mean you to enjoy him then?

ALBANY. The let-alone¹⁴ lies not in your good will.

EDMUND. Nor in thine, lad.

ALBANY. Half-blooded¹⁵ fellow, yes.

⁸ common bosom—the affections of the people.
solders. ¹⁰ subject—subordinate officer.
mediate representative. ¹² compeers—equals.
prohibition. ¹⁵ Half-blooded—bastard.

⁹ impress'd lances—weapons of our sol-
11 The which immediacy—he, as my imme-
13 full-flowing—angry. ¹⁴ let-alone—

REGAN [*to EDMUND*]. Let the drum strike, and prove my title thine.

ALBANY. Stay yet; hear reason. Edmund, I arrest thee

On capital treason; and, in thine attaint,¹⁶

This gilded serpent. [*Pointing to GONERIL.*] For your claim, fair sister,
I bar it in the interest of my wife.

'T is she is sub-contracted to this lord,

And I, her husband, contradict your bans.

If you will marry, make your loves to me,

My lady is bespoke.

GONERIL. An interlude!¹⁷

ALBANY. Thou art armed, Gloucester; let the trumpet sound.

If none appear to prove upon thy person

Thy heinous, manifest, and many treasons,

There is my pledge [*Throwing down a glove.*]

I'll prove it on thy heart,

Ere I taste bread, thou art in nothing less

Than I have here proclaim'd thee.

REGAN. Sick, O sick!

GONERIL [*aside*]. If not, I'll ne'er trust medicine.

EDMUND. There's my exchange. [*Throwing down a glove.*]

What in the world he is

That names me traitor, villain-like he lies.

Call by the trumpet;—he that dares approach,

On him, on you, who not? I will maintain

My truth and honour firmly.

ALBANY. A herald, ho!

EDMUND. A herald, ho, a herald!

ALBANY. Trust to thy single virtue;¹⁸ for thy soldiers,

All levied in my name, have in my name

Took their discharge.

REGAN. My sickness grows upon me.

ALBANY. She is not well; convey her to my tent. [*Exit REGAN, led.*]

[*Enter a HERALD.*]

Come hither, herald,—Let the trumpet sound—

And read out this.

CAPTAIN. Sound, trumpet! [*A trumpet sounds.*]

HERALD. [*Reads.*]

If any man of quality or degree within the lists of the
army will maintain upon Edmund, supposed Earl of Gloucester,
that he is a manifold traitor, let him appear by the third
sound of the trumpet. He is bold in his defence.

EDMUND. Sound! [*First trumpet.*]

HERALD. Again! [*Second trumpet.*]

HERALD. Again! [*Third trumpet.*]

[*Trumpet answers within.*]

[*Enter EDGAR, at the third sound, armed with a trumpet before him.*]

¹⁶ in thine attaint—accused with you.
strength.

¹⁷ An interlude—what a farce.

¹⁸ virtue—

ALBANY. Ask him his purposes, why he appears
Upon this call o' th' trumpet.

HERALD. What are you?
Your name, your quality? and why you answer
This present summons?

EDGAR. Know, my name is lost,
By treason's tooth bare-gnawn and canker-bit;¹⁹
Yet am I noble as the adversary
I come to cope.

ALBANY. Which is that adversary?

EDGAR. What's he that speaks for Edmund Earl of Gloucester?

EDMUND. Himself; what say'st thou to him?

EDGAR. Draw thy sword,
That, if my speech offend a noble heart,
Thy arm may do thee justice; here is mine.
Behold, it is the privilege of mine honours,
My oath, and my profession. I protest,
Maugre²⁰ thy strength, youth, place, and eminence,
Despite thy victor-sword and fire-new fortune,
Thy valour, and thy heart, thou art a traitor;
False to thy gods, thy brother, and thy father;
Conspirant 'gainst this high illustrious prince;
And from th' extremest upward of thy head
To the descent and dust beneath thy foot,
A most toad-spotted traitor. Say thou "No,"
This sword, this arm, and my best spirits are bent
To prove upon thy heart, whereto I speak,
Thou liest.

EDMUND. In wisdom I should ask thy name;
But, since thy outside looks so fair and warlike,
And that thy tongue some 'say²¹ of breeding breathes,
What safe and nicely I might well delay,
By rule of knighthood, I disdain and spurn.
Back do I toss these treasons to thy head,
With the hell-hated lie o'erwhelm thy heart,
Which, for they yet glance by and scarcely bruise,
This sword of mine shall give them instant way,
Where they shall rest for ever. Trumpets, speak!

[*Alarums. They fight. EDMUND falls.*]

ALBANY. Save him, save him!

CONERIL. This is mere practice,²² Gloucester.
By the law of arms thou wast not bound to answer
An unknown opposite: thou art not vanquish'd,
But cozen'd and beguil'd.

ALBANY. Shut your mouth, dame,
Or with this paper shall I stop it. Hold, sir.—

¹⁹ canker-bit—worm eaten.
trickery.

²⁰ Maugre—despite.

²¹ 'say—trace.

²² practice—

Thou worse than any name, read thine own evil.
No tearing, lady; I perceive you know it.

GONERIL. Say, if I do, the laws are mine, not thine,
Who can arraign me for 't?

ALBANY. Most monstrous! oh!—
Know'st thou this paper?

GONERIL. Ask me not what I know. [*Exit.*]

ALBANY. Go after her; she's desperate; govern²³ her.

EDMUND. What you have charg'd me with, that have I done;
And more, much more; the time will bring it out.

'T is past, and so am I. But what art thou
That has this fortune on me? If thou 'rt noble,
I do forgive thee.

EDGAR. Let's exchange charity.
I am no less in blood than thou art, Edmund;
If more, the more thou 'st wrong'd me.
My name is Edgar, and thy father's son.
The gods are just, and of our pleasant vices
Make instruments to plague us.
The dark and vicious place where thee he got
Cost him his eyes.

EDMUND. Thou 'st spoken right, 't is true.
The wheel is come full circle; I am here.

ALBANY. Methought thy very gait did prophesy
A royal nobleness. I must embrace thee.
Let sorrow split my heart, if ever I
Did hate thee or thy father!

EDGAR. Worthy prince, I know 't.

ALBANY. Where have you hid yourself?
How have you known the miseries of your father?

EDGAR. By nursing them, my lord. List a brief tale;
And when 't is told, oh, that my heart would burst!
The bloody proclamation to escape,
That follow'd me so near,—oh, our lives' sweetness!
That we the pain of death would hourly die
Rather than die at once!—taught me to shift
Into a madman's rags, t' assume a semblance
That very dogs disdain'd; and in this habit
Met I my father with his bleeding rings,
Their precious stones new lost; became his guide,
Led him, begg'd for him, sav'd him from despair;
Never,—O fault!—reveal'd myself unto him,
Until some half-hour past, when I was arm'd.
Not sure, though hoping, of this good success,
I ask'd his blessing, and from first to last
Told him my pilgrimage; but his flaw'd heart,
Alack, too weak the conflict to support!

²³ govern—restrain.

'Twixt two extremes of passion, joy and grief,
Burst smilingly.

EDMUND. This speech of yours hath mov'd me,
And shall perchance do good. But speak you on;
You look as you had something more to say.

ALBANY. If there be more, more woeful, hold it in;
For I am almost ready to dissolve,
Hearing of this.

EDGAR. This would have seem'd a period²⁴
To such as love not sorrow; but another,
To amplify too much, would make much more,
And top extremity.²⁵

Whilst I was big in clamour came there in a man,
Who, having seen me in my worst estate,
Shunn'd my abhorr'd society; but then, finding
Who 't was that so endur'd, with his strong arms
He fasten'd on my neck, and bellow'd out
As he'd burst heaven: threw him on my father;
Told the most piteous tale of Lear and him
That ever ear received; which in recounting,
His grief grew puissant,²⁶ and the strings of life
Began to crack. Twice then the trumpets sounded,
And there I left him tranc'd.²⁷

ALBANY. But who was this?

EDGAR. Kent, sir, the banish'd Kent; who in disguise
Follow'd his enemy²⁸ king, and did him service
Improper for²⁹ a slave.

[Enter a GENTLEMAN with a bloody knife.]

GENTLEMAN. Help, help, O, help.

EDGAR. What kind of help?

ALBANY.

Speak, man.

EDGAR. What means this bloody knife?

GENTLEMAN. 'T is hot, it smokes;

It came from the heart of—O, she's dead!

ALBANY. Who dead? Speak, man.

GENTLEMAN. Your lady, sir, your lady; and her sister
By her is poison'd; she confesses it.

EDMUND. I was contracted to them both. All three
Now marry in an instant.

EDGAR. Here comes Kent.

[Enter KENT.]

ALBANY. Produce the bodies, be they alive or dead.
This judgement of the heavens, that makes us tremble,
Touches us not with pity. [Exit GENTLEMAN.]

—O, is this he?

The time will not allow the compliment³⁰

²⁴ period—end. ²⁵ top extremity—pass all limits. ²⁶ puissant—powerful. ²⁷ tranc'd
—unconscious. ²⁸ enemy—who had declared him an enemy. ²⁹ Improper for—
more than would be demanded of. ³⁰ compliment—ceremony.

Which very manners urges.

KENT. I am come
To bid my king and master aye good-night.
Is he not here?

ALBANY. Great thing of us forgot!
Speak, Edmund, where's the King? and where's Cordelia?
[*The bodies of CONERIL and REGAN are brought in.*]
See'st thou this object, Kent?

KENT. Alack, why thus?

EDMUND. Yet Edmund was belov'd!
The one the other poison'd for my sake,
And after slew herself.

ALBANY. Even so. Cover their faces.

EDMUND. I pant for life. Some good I mean to do,
Despite of mine own nature. Quickly send,
Be brief in it, to the castle; for my writ
Is on the life of Lear and on Cordelia.
Nay, send in time.

ALBANY. Run, run, O, run!

EDGAR. To whom, my lord? Who has the office? Send
Thy token of reprieve.

EDMUND. Well thought on. Take my sword,
Give it the captain.

EDGAR. Haste thee, for thy life. [*Exit GENTLEMAN.*]

EDMUND. He hath commission from thy wife and me
To hang Cordelia in the prison, and
To lay the blame upon her own despair,
That she fordid³¹ herself.

ALBANY. The gods defend her! Bear him hence a while.

[*EDMUND is borne off.*]

[*Enter LEAR with CORDELIA in his arms, GENTLEMAN following.*]

LEAR. Howl, howl, howl! O, you are men of stones!
Had I your tongues and eyes, I'd use them so
That heaven's vault should crack. She's gone for ever!
I know when one is dead, and when one lives;
She's dead as earth. Lend me a looking-glass;
If that her breath will mist or stain the stone,³²
Why, then she lives.

KENT. Is this the promis'd end?³³

EDGAR. Or image of that horror?

ALBANY. Fall, and cease!

LEAR. This feather stirs; she lives! If it be so,
It is a chance which does redeem all sorrows
That ever I have felt.

KENT [*kneeling*]. O my good master!

LEAR. Prithee, away.

³¹ fordid—destroyed.

³² stone—glass, mirror.

³³ promis'd end—Day of Judgement.

EDGAR. 'T is noble Kent, your friend.

LEAR. A plague upon you, murderous traitors all!
I might have sav'd her; now she's gone for ever!
Cordelia, Cordelia! stav a little. Ha!
What is 't thou say'st? Her voice was ever soft,
Gentle, and low; an excellent thing in woman.
I kill'd the slave that was a-hanging thee.

GENTLEMAN. 'T is true, my lords, he did.

LEAR. Did I not, fellow?

I have seen the day, with my good biting falchion³⁴
I would have made them skip. I am old now,
And these same crosses³⁵ spoil me. Who are you?
Mine eyes are not o' th' best. I'll tell you straight.

KENT. If Fortune brag of two she lov'd and hated,³⁶
One of them we behold.

LEAR. This is a dull sight. Are you not Kent?

KENT. The same,

Your servant Kent. Where is your servant Caius?

LEAR. He's a good fellow, I can tell you that;
He'll strike and quickly too. He's dead and rotten.

KENT. No, my good lord; I am the very man,—

LEAR. I'll see that straight.

KENT. —That, from your first of difference³⁷ and decay,
Have follow'd your sad steps.

LEAR. You're welcome hither.

KENT. Nor no man else; all's cheerless, dark, and deadly.
Your eldest daughters have fordone themselves,
And desperately are dead.

LEAR. Ay, so I think.

ALBANY. He knows not what he says; and vain is it
That we present us to him.

[Enter a MESSENGER.]

EDGAR. Very bootless.

MESSENGER. Edmund is dead, my lord.

ALBANY. That's but a trifle here,—

You lords and noble friends, know our intent.
What comfort to this great decay³⁸ may come
Shall be appli'd. For us, we will resign,
During the life of this old majesty,
To him our absolute power; [To EDGAR and KENT.] you, to your rights,
With boot, and such addition as your honours
Have more than merited. All friends shall taste
The wages of their virtue, and all foes
The cup of their deservings. O, see, see!

LEAR. And my poor fool³⁹ is hang'd! No, no, no life!
Why should a dog, a horse, a rat, have life,

³⁴ falchion—sword. ³⁵ crosses—sufferings. ³⁶ lov'd and hated—i.e., at the same time. ³⁷ first of difference—beginning of the change in your fortunes. ³⁸ decay—fallen man. ³⁹ poor fool—i.e., Cordelia.

And thou no breath at all? Thou 'lt come no more,
Never, never, never, never, never!
Pray you, undo this button. Thank you, sir.
Do you see this? Look on her, look, her lips,
Look there, look there! [*Dies.*]

EDGAR. He faints! My lord, my lord!

KENT. Break, heart; I prithee, break!

EDGAR. Look up, my lord.

KENT. Vex not his ghost; O, let him pass! He hates him
That would upon the rack⁴⁰ of this tough world
Stretch him out longer.

EDGAR. He is gone, indeed.

KENT. The wonder is he hath endur'd so long;
He but usurp'd his life.

ALBANY. Bear them from hence. Our present business
Is general woe. [*To KENT and EDGAR.*] Friends of my soul, you twain
Rule in this realm, and the gor'd⁴¹ state sustain.

KENT. I have a journey, sir, shortly to go:
My master calls me, I must not say no.

EDGAR. The weight of this sad time we must obey;
Speak what we feel, not what we ought to say.
The oldest hath borne most; we that are young
Shall never see so much, nor live so long. [*Exeunt, with a dead march.*]

COMMENTARY

Of the supreme achievements of the creative mind with which *King Lear* is usually compared, it is perhaps the only one that seems to issue in hopelessness. Our conception of greatness in art inclines to set special store by the tragic vision, and our highest admiration most readily goes to those works that have some large element of darkness and dread. But when we bring to mind the masterpieces of art, and not only of literary art, with which *King Lear* is commonly ranked—the *Iliad*, *Oedipus Rex*, *The Divine Comedy*, Michelangelo's *Last Judgment*, Bach's *B-Minor Mass*, Beethoven's *Fifth Symphony*—we perceive that in all of them the dark elements are countered by strong affirmative emotions and attitudes. If in any of these works hope is not fully ascendant, it at least holds in balance the elements that might make for despair.

We do not necessarily feel this of *King Lear*. Here is a pre-eminently great work in which the positive expectations of life are considerably outweighed by the horrifying circumstances that are put before us. It is true that at the end of the play the evil-doers have been destroyed, the good are in control of the kingdom, and order and justice are soon to be restored. But the concluding scene speaks less of peace, let alone of hope, than of an ultimate weariness. Again and again in the course of the play the goodness and meaningfulness of life have been brought into question, and now, as life is about to resume its normal course, it

⁴⁰ rack—instrument of torture.

⁴¹ gor'd—wounded.

can show little of the energy that might dispel the doubts that have been raised. In his last speech Kent refuses Albany's invitation to share the rule of the realm, giving as his reason that his death, which he desires, is near at hand. And Edgar's concluding words seem so charged with fatigue that they can scarcely get themselves uttered:

The weight of this sad time we must obey;
Speak what we feel, not what we ought to say.
The oldest hath borne most; we that are young
Shall never see so much, nor live so long.

No other of Shakespeare's tragedies ends on anything like the note of exhaustion sounded by these gray monosyllables. The closing speeches of *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, and *Antony and Cleopatra* move to a music that summons the future into being.

Perhaps nothing can better suggest the uniquely despairing quality of *King Lear* than Keats's sonnet "On Sitting Down to Read *King Lear* Once Again." The young poet confronts with anxiety the experience he has freely chosen to undergo. He speaks of the play as "the fierce dispute / Between damnation and impassion'd clay." It is not a dispute from which he can stand apart, a passive listener; he must be involved in it, and with a painful intensity—he must, as he says, "burn through" it. This burning-through is not only painful but dangerous, and Keats is impelled to address a prayer to Shakespeare and the "clouds of Albion," asking their protection in the ordeal to which he is about to submit himself:

Let me not wander in a barren dream,
But when I am consumed in the fire,
Give me new Phoenix wings to fly at my desire.

Keats's fear lest his experience leave him "barren" suggests how far *King Lear* may be from conforming to Aristotle's belief that tragedy fulfils a hygienic or therapeutic function. By inducing in the spectator emotions that are kept under strict control by its circumstantial or formal elements, a tragic play is said to bring about the discharge of such distress as habitually besets the mind and to establish an emotional equilibrium that sustains the vital energies. But Keats, from his previous readings of *King Lear*, anticipates that this particular tragedy may have exactly the opposite effect upon him.

His anxiety is not hard to understand; we share his apprehension of the destructive power the play might exert, for it seems to have the avowed intention of *assaulting* us. The storm in Act III, which is described as being more violent than any storm in memory, figures in the minds of many readers as the epitome or emblem of a play that batters and overwhelms us. One incident, the blinding of Gloucester, is so painful to read, let alone see on the stage, that doubts of its propriety as art have been expressed even by critics who are reluctant to admit that Shakespeare can ever be at fault. The murder of Cordelia in the face of our reasonable expectation that she will be rescued seems so gratuitous a blow to our hopes that the famous Shakespeare critic, A. C. Bradley, has actually defended, although not with entire seriousness, the eighteenth-century version of *King Lear* that revised the ending into a happy one.

One way in which the play manifests its intention of assault is by its refusal

of artistic economy in favor of redundancy and excess. Thus, in representing filial disloyalty it is not content with the instance of Lear's two elder daughters but adds, what is no part of the traditional story upon which the play is based, Edmund's betrayal of Gloucester. One aged man wandering the world in misery is not enough: there must be two. As Lear's plight is paralleled by Gloucester's, so the overthrow of his mind is reiterated by the madness Edgar assumes, and this antiphony of significant irrationality is pointed up by the wild joking of the Fool. No play has ever had so many villains. Four of the leading characters, Edmund, Goneril, Regan, and Cornwall, are evil almost beyond belief, and they are appropriately served by the contemptible Oswald and the brutal captain who murders Cordelia. It has become almost a commonplace of critical analysis of *King Lear* to remark on its plethora of references to animals—133 references to 64 different animals—as if to press upon us a vision of humanity descending to brutishness.

The question of the governance of the world is often touched on in the play and always with the effect of reminding us either of its harshness or of its mysteriousness. The characters frequently appeal to or speak about "the gods," but from the things they say of them it is impossible to conclude what the divine disposition can be. Little ground is left for believing the gods beneficent. Gloucester calls them "ever-gentle" but in circumstances that lead us to take that epithet (and Gloucester's subsequent reference to "the bounty and the benison of Heaven") as ironical, the irony being intended not by Gloucester himself but by the play. Edgar says that the gods are "just," but the instance of the divine justice he cites, his father's having lost his sight in punishment for the "darkness" of the illicit sexual episode in which he begot Edmund, disgusts us with its agents and alienates us from the person who remarks it. The characterization of the gods that we are likely to remember best speaks of their affinity with the devils who are so often mentioned in the play:

As flies to wanton boys, are we to the gods,
They kill us for their sport.

"Nature" is frequently referred to in *King Lear* as a governing principle, but we can never be sure what nature means. It is invoked by Edmund as his "goddess," a deity who will provide the "law" that justifies his machinations. Lear calls it to witness the wrongs that have been done him, but to no avail. If nature is sometimes portrayed as normative and beneficent, it is also shown to be indifferent or hostile. The assaulting storm, after all, is a phenomenon of nature. If nature may at one moment represent a principle of order, duty, and innocence, at another it is the principle of those animals, almost always regarded with aversion, which haunt the play.

That *King Lear* raises very dark thoughts indeed is denied by no one. The question debated by critics is whether the play in its whole and final effect is one of unrelieved pessimism or whether from the darkness some new light is born, possibly the brighter for the blackness from which it shines. One party to the debate takes its stand on the Aristotelean paradox of tragedy, that from dire events emerges some sensation of peace or reconciliation, some new readiness to accept life's pain, and not in passive acquiescence but in augmented strength of soul, and even with something like hope. To which the opposing party rejoins

that, whatever tragedy is supposed to do and whatever in general it may do, this particular tragedy does not conform to type.

In the end the party of hope is forced to rely upon specious reasoning. It argues that the experience of Lear and Gloucester comprises not only their terrible sufferings but also the spiritual changes they undergo as a result of their agony. These changes are said to amount to regeneration—at the end of the play Lear and Gloucester are better men than they were at the beginning, they have been redeemed through suffering. A universal order that permits this redemption to take place is to be regarded as hopeful, as making no occasion for pessimism. In his introduction to *King Lear* in the Cambridge *New Shakespeare*, G. I. Duthie formulates the position thus: "The gods are merciful. If, after all their agony, Lear and Gloucester died uneducated, unregenerate, then we should indeed have to speak of pessimism. But both, as they die, are wise and redeemed. 'Nothing is here for tears'—unless we weep for the means that conduces to the end, for the dreadful cost of the salutary outcome. We must do so; and the conclusion of the play has indeed a sober colouring. Yet the unassailable fact remains that the gods, in benignity, permit Lear and Gloucester to die in a state of spiritual health. Their sufferings are redemptive. There is no ultimate ground for pessimism here."

One must wonder what special meaning this writer assigns to "merciful" and what sort of "benignity" it is that "permits" the two old men to die in the state of "spiritual health" they have so grimly won. In the *Book of Job* one of Job's friends advances the idea that suffering, because it can serve to discipline and enlighten man's spirit, is to be understood as an instance of God's benevolence; but Job will have none of this facile defence of the divine order, and the Voice that speaks out of the whirlwind, God's own voice, says that Job is right to reject his friend's view as a mere rationalization. Some three thousand years later Mr. Duthie proposes the same view. It is perhaps possible to find comfort in the idea that the world is a school in which the soul is "educated" or a sanatorium in which it may regain "spiritual health"; yet we must inevitably remark that the authorities who govern these two institutions charge quite exorbitant fees for their redemptive services. Mr. Duthie himself speaks of the "dreadful cost of the salutary outcome" over which we might understandably shed tears. A cost dreadful indeed: so very dreadful that tears scarcely seem adequate to it, rather some awful cry, such as Lear's "Howl, howl, howl." Or, if tears at all, then those that Lear wept on his "wheel of fire," that "do scald like molten lead."¹

As against arguments of the kind that Mr. Duthie advances, the opposite position accords more closely with our usual human experience of the play. The formulation which in our time has commanded most attention is that of the

¹ It is oddly tactless of Mr. Duthie to quote the famous "Nothing is here for tears" from Milton's *Samson Agonistes*. The line refers to Samson's death. Samson has died in a moment of triumph, performing an act that serves his God and his people. Having sinned against the divine gift of his superhuman strength, he had been betrayed by his Philistine wife, who cut off his long hair, in which lay his power, and delivered him to his Philistine enemies. After a period of humiliation, suffering, and repentance as a slave of the Philistines, Samson finds his strength returning as his hair grows again. On a religious festival of his heathen masters, he brings down the roof of the temple in which the Philistine nobility is gathered, knowing that he too must perish. He dies not only as a man redeemed but as a victorious hero, the savior of his people. It is indeed true that nothing is *here* for tears, but how different is his situation from that of King Lear!

Polish critic Jan Kott in his influential book, *Shakespeare Our Contemporary*. Professor Kott says that *King Lear* has never been dealt with in a direct and unembarrassed way, that "the cruelty of Shakespeare's world" has never been fully confronted. He finds the clue to this failure in the lack of appreciation of the mode of the *grotesque* which is salient in the play. The mode of the grotesque, he says, is crueller than the tragic mode, and the critics have ignored the extent of its presence in *King Lear*, occupied as they have been with finding justification for their belief that the play makes the traditional "affirmation" of tragedy, such justification as may be found in the idea that "suffering ennobled Lear and restored his tragic greatness." And he undertakes to demonstrate the affinity of *King Lear* with the so-called theatre of the absurd, that strong and often impressive tendency of contemporary drama to represent, by the grotesque or by "black" comedy, the metaphysical pointlessness of human life.

Professor Kott does not do justice to the awareness of the pessimistic force of *King Lear* that has in fact prevailed; as for the element of the grotesque in the play, its importance was demonstrated in elaborate detail in a well-known essay by G. Wilson Knight as long ago as 1930.² Yet perhaps no critic has been so uncompromising as Professor Kott in insisting on the pessimism of *King Lear*. Indeed, pessimism scarcely describes what he tells us Shakespeare is propounding, which is nothing less than nihilism, the view that there is no meaning to be discovered in the universe, and, in consequence, but little in human existence.

Professor Kott reminds us that the basic assumption of traditional tragedy was that the universe, or, as he calls it, the absolute, was informed by a transcendent reason variously thought of as the gods, or God, or Nature, or History understood as a process. Because this transcendent reason was inscrutable, never available to human understanding, man was likely to be out of step with it and, in consequence, all too susceptible to defeat and suffering. But the downfall of the tragic hero was the means by which tragedy affirmed the existence of a transcendent reason. Such affirmation is no longer possible—in our time the assumption that a transcendent reason exists has lost virtually all its old force. Reason may be thought of as an attribute of man but not as an attribute of the universe; and man's suffering, which once could be supposed to have meaning because of its relation to the universal reason, can now be thought only grotesque. "In the world of the grotesque," Professor Kott says, "downfall cannot be justified by, or blamed on, the absolute. The absolute is not endowed with any ultimate reasons; it is stronger, and that is all. The absolute is absurd." It is in the light of this modern conception of absurdity that *King Lear* must be understood—only thus, Professor Kott says, can we comprehend the full extent of the cruelty of its world, a cruelty that it is not possible to explain because it is wholly without meaning.

There can be no doubt that *King Lear* gives us ground for thinking the universe absurd. Again and again it proposes the idea of some ineluctable contradiction between the universe and man. Man's existence proceeds in circumstances so painful that we may well think of them as arranged by a hostile power which is the more terrible because no purpose can be ascribed to its enmity nor any order discerned in its behavior. Again this irrational animus there is no defence—all that men can do is endure. And the despair that *King Lear* embodies

² "*King Lear* and the Comedy of the Grotesque," in *The Wheel of Fire*.

is concentrated in the line in which Edgar says what it is that they must endure, their "going hence, even as their coming hither"—it is surely a despairing imagination that proposes the bitterness of dying in terms of the bitterness of being born. The phrase that follows, "Ripeness is all," does not qualify the sentiment, for "ripeness" here does not mean richness or fulness of life but readiness for death, the only escape from absurdity.

But the incompatibility between rational man and an absurd universe is only one of the two explanations of human suffering suggested in *King Lear*. The other holds man himself accountable for his pain, either through his self-deception or through the cruelty of other members of the race. The play makes no hard and fast distinction between the two explanations. Nevertheless we can scarcely doubt that it requires us to see that the immediate cause of any man's suffering is his fellow man: the cruel will of nonhuman powers is put into execution by evil men. The intensity of the suffering is such and the bitterness over man's destiny of suffering is such that they can find adequate expression only by crying out to heaven. But at the quiet heart of the whirling speculations about the universe or the absolute there lies the idea of human justice and human mercy. When it is said that Lear is "regenerated" and "redeemed," the change that is being remarked upon in the aged king is his new consciousness of man's inhumanity to man, of the general failure of justice: his mind becomes obsessed with justice, he is filled with disgust at those human traits that stand in the way of its being done—greed, lust, pride, and the hypocrisy that masks them. And with the new consciousness of justice goes a new sense of the need for *caritas*, which is not "charity" in our usual modern sense, but "caring," the solicitude of loving-kindness:

Poor naked wretches, wheresoe'er you are,
That bide the pelting of this pitiless storm,
How shall your houseless heads and unfed sides,
Your loop'd and window'd raggedness, defend you
From seasons such as these? O, I have ta'en
Too little care of this! Take physic, pomp;
Expose thyself to feel what wretches feel,
That thou mayst shake the superflux to them,
And show the heavens more just.

Although Lear does touch upon the cruelty of the universe, this is far less the object of his new consciousness than the failure of man's governance of himself, his falling short of what is required of him in doing justice and in loving mercy.

If we speak of a "failure" and a "falling short," we suggest not merely a thing to be desired, but also a standard or norm. I have said that we never know just how to understand the word "nature" as it is used in *King Lear*. But we cannot fail to recognize that among its several meanings is that of a normative principle. And one element of the human norm it implies, one term of the definition of man, is a certain degree of moral virtue, or at least the propensity for conduct which, if it departs from virtue, does not do so beyond a certain point. The play offers abundant evidence that human beings are capable of going well beyond that point. Yet the supposition that man's nature is to be defined in moral terms is not thereby denied.

Our commitment to the idea of the normative virtue of man is apparent in our language, as in our use of the word "humanity" to mean kindness or at least compunction in dealing with other members of the race, or with animals. Burns's famous lines, "Man's inhumanity to man / Makes countless thousands mourn," which everyone understands, would be nonsense were we not to take normative virtue for granted, for what could it possibly mean to speak of human beings acting in an inhuman fashion unless the *idea* of being human implied a degree of goodness, whatever the *actuality* of being human may mean? Bradley has remarked on the frequency with which the idea of monstrosity appears in *King Lear*; the play, he says, is replete with "beings, actions, states of mind, which appear not only abnormal but absolutely contrary to nature." In the degree to which people are good, they are felt to be natural, Kent and Cordelia being obvious cases in point: we are aware of their naturalness as a positive quality of their being, expressing itself in their manner and mode of speech. But Goneril and Regan are said by Lear to be "unnatural hags." Cornwall's blinding of Gloucester is an unnatural act, and an especially moving moment of the play represents the natural response to the monstrosity of this deed: one of Cornwall's servants cannot endure it and, knowing that he risks his life, draws his sword to prevent it. To Shakespeare's contemporary audience, this action must have been even more momentous than it is to us, for to the Elizabethans the idea of a servant confronting his master with a show of force would have been shocking, even unnatural. The Elizabethan judgment is underscored by Cornwall's crying out amazed, "My villain!" (using the word in its old sense of farm servant), and by Regan's exclamation, "A peasant stand up thus!" To the feudal lord and lady it was as much a shattering of the natural order for their servant to defy them as Lear felt it to be when his daughters rejected him. Shakespeare quite shared the opinion of his time; he believed that the deference given to superiors was in the order of nature. But in this instance his sympathy is given to the peasant who flares into hopeless rebellion at the hideous deed, who, though he break the "natural" bonds of society, does so because he recognizes a claim yet *more* natural, that of his humanity, of justice and mercy.

An awareness of the Elizabethan feeling about the naturalness of the social order will lead us to a more accurate judgment of the act out of which all the horrors and misfortunes arose, Lear's division of his kingdom. To this no Elizabethan, and surely not Shakespeare himself, would have responded with indifference. Again and again in his plays, Shakespeare speaks in praise of unity, of the organic interrelation of the parts of a polity. To divide a kingdom, to treat a realm as if it were not a living organism, was worse than imprudent, it was unnatural. It may have been unavoidable in view of Lear's failing strength and the lack of a male heir, but still it went against nature; its consequences could only be bad.

In short, *King Lear* raises moral, social, and even political considerations that mark out an area in which human life is not wholly determined by non-human forces, in which the absurdity of the universe is not wholly decisive. Although this area is not coextensive with man's existence, it is of very large extent. One hesitates to speak of it as an area of freedom, if only because any one individual is so little likely to be free within it. Yet it is the precinct in which mankind as a whole, with due regard to the well-being of its individual members, has the possibility of freedom. To be aware of this possibility will scarcely

dispel all the dark thoughts that the play induces. But it does qualify the view that human suffering is to be referred only to an absurd dispensation.

Some large part of the human condition is, however, imposed upon man and makes a fate that is as grotesque as it is inescapable. Lear must grow old, his powers of body and mind must wane and fail. Nothing can save him from this destined end. Yet this in itself is not the root of his suffering as the play represents it. What maddens the old man is the loss of what might sustain him in his decline, the honor and dignity he had assumed to be his inalienable right. To grow old is a hard destiny. But to grow old in honor and dignity is not unendurable, while to grow old shorn of respect is a nightmare, the very essence of the grotesque. Respect is sometimes regarded as a sort of social fiction because it is expressed through signs and outward forms, such as the manner and tone in which the respected person is addressed, or the appurtenances of life that are bestowed upon him. Lear himself defines the symbolic nature of respect in his great reply to Regan's statement that he has no "need" of his train of knights:

O, reason not the need! Our basest beggars
Are in the poorest thing superfluous.
Allow not nature more than nature needs,
Man's life is cheap as beast's. Thou art a lady;
If only to go warm were gorgeous,
Why, nature needs not what thou gorgeous wear'st,
Which scarcely keeps thee warm.

He says in effect that man creates his own needs—and that these are even more imperative than those of biology. The meanings and "values" that social man invents for himself are presented as of transcendent importance not only in this speech of Lear's but throughout the play, most notably in all that Kent and Cordelia say to the old man and all they do for him, in the one short time when they have him in their loving charge, to assure him that he has been restored to his kingliness and to the respect that befits it.

Of all that is implied by the play's intense awareness of that area of life in which human conceptions and conduct are prepotent, Professor Kott takes no account in his effort to demonstrate the nihilism of *King Lear*. "The theme of *King Lear*," he says, "is the decay and fall of the world." And so in part it is, but in part only—the full theme of *King Lear* is the decay and fall of the world as a consequence of a decay and fall of the human soul. It is indeed true that the vitality of the meanings and values created by man depends to some extent on a belief in a transcendent reason, and that to doubt the existence of such reason puts all in doubt. This would seem to be the animating idea of the theatre of the absurd in which Professor Kott finds such strong affinities with *King Lear*. But the dramatist of the theatre of the absurd takes for granted a metaphysical negation which has the effect of destroying the old human meanings and of making human life grotesque, whereas such a causal sequence was not conceived by Shakespeare. He took for granted a rational and moralized universe but proposed the idea that this universal order might be reduced to chaos by human evil.

Speaking in praise of *King Lear*, the English novelist Iris Murdoch said, "Only the very greatest art invigorates without consoling. . . ." That *King Lear* does not console is plain enough. If we ask how, in the face of its dire report

of life, this play can be said to invigorate, the answer is that it does us the honor of supposing that we will make every possible effort of mind to withstand the force of its despair and to understand the complexity of what it tells us about the nature of human existence: it draws us into more activity than we had thought ourselves capable of.

THE WILD DUCK

H E N R I K I B S E N

1828 – 1906

CHARACTERS

HAAKON WERLE, wholesale merchant and millowner

GREGERS WERLE, his son

OLD EKDAL

HJALMAR EKDAL, his son, a photographer

GINA EKDAL, Hjalmar's wife

HEDVIG, their daughter, aged fourteen

MRS. SØRBY, housekeeper for the elder Werle

RELLING, a doctor

MOLVIK, a former divinity student

GRAABERG, a bookkeeper

PETTERSEN, manservant to the elder Werle

JENSEN, a hired waiter

A FAT MAN

A BALD-HEADED MAN

A NEARSIGHTED MAN

SIX OTHER MEN, dinner guests at Werle's

OTHER HIRED SERVANTS

The first act takes place in WERLE's house; the following four acts in HJALMAR EKDAL's studio.

ACT I

At WERLE's house. A richly and comfortably furnished study, with book-cases and upholstered furniture, a writing table, with papers and reports, in the middle of the floor, and green-shaded lamps softly illuminating the room. In the rear wall, open folding doors with curtains drawn back disclose a large, fashionable room, brightly lit by lamps and candelabra. In the right foreground of the study, a small private door leads to the offices. In the left foreground, a fireplace filled with glowing coals, and further back a double door to the dining room.

WERLE's manservant, PETTERSEN, in livery, and JENSEN, a hired waiter, in black, are straightening up the study. In the larger room two or three other hired waiters are moving about, putting things in order and lighting more candles. In from the dining room come laughter and the hum of many voices in conversation; a knife clinks upon a glass; silence; a toast is made; cries of "Bravo," and the hum of conversation resumes.

PETTERSEN [*lighting a lamp by the fireplace and putting on the shade*]. Ah, you hear that, Jensen. Now the old boy's up on his feet, proposing a long toast to Mrs. Sørby.

JENSEN [*moving an armchair forward*]. Is it really true what people say, that there's something between them?

PETTERSEN. Lord knows.

JENSEN. I've heard he was a real goat in his day.

PETTERSEN. Could be.

JENSEN. But they say it's his son he's throwing this party for.

PETTERSEN. Yes. His son came home yesterday.

JENSEN. I never knew before that old Werle had any son.

PETTERSEN. Oh yes, he's got a son. But he spends all his time up at the works in Hoidal. He hasn't been in town all the years I've served in this house.

A HIRED WAITER [*in the door to the other room*]. Say, Pettersen, there's an old guy here who—

PETTERSEN [*muttering*]. What the hell—somebody coming now!

[*Old EKDAL appears from the right through the inner room. He is dressed in a shabby overcoat with a high collar, woolen gloves, and in his hand, a cane and a fur cap; under his arm is a bundle wrapped in brown paper. He has a dirty, reddish-brown wig and a little gray moustache.*]

PETTERSEN [*going toward him*]. Good Lord, what do you want in here? EKDAL [*at the door*]. Just have to get into the office, Pettersen.

PETTERSEN. The office closed an hour ago, and—

EKDAL. Heard that one at the door, boy. But Graaberg's still in there. Be nice, Pettersen, and let me slip in that way. [*Pointing toward the private entrance.*] I've gone that way before.

PETTERSEN. All right, go ahead, then. [*Opens the door.*] But don't forget now—take the other way out; we have guests.

EKDAL. Got you—hmm! Thanks, Pettersen, good old pal! Thanks. [*To himself.*] Bonehead! [*He goes into the office; PETTERSEN shuts the door after him.*]

JENSEN. Is *he* on the office staff too?

PETTERSEN. No, he's just someone who does copying on the outside when it's needed. Still, in his time he was well up in the world, old Ekdal.

JENSEN. Yes, he looks like he's been a little of everything.

PETTERSEN. Oh yes. He was a lieutenant once, if you can imagine.

JENSEN. Good Lord—him a lieutenant!

PETTERSEN. So help me, he was. But then he went into the lumber business or something. They say he must have pulled some kind of dirty deal on the old man once, for the two of them were running the Hoidal works together then. Oh, I know good old Ekdal, all right. We've drunk many a schnapps and bottle of beer together over at Eriksen's.

JENSEN. He can't have much money for standing drinks.

PETTERSEN. My Lord, Jensen, you can bet it's me that stands the drinks. I always say a person ought to act refined toward quality that's come down in life.

JENSEN. Did he go bankrupt, then?

PETTERSEN. No, worse than that. He was sent to jail.

JENSEN. To jail!

PETTERSEN. Or maybe it was the penitentiary. [*Laughter from the dining room.*] Hist! They're leaving the table.

[*The dining room door is opened by a pair of servants inside. MRS. SØRBY, in conversation with two gentlemen, comes out. A moment later the rest of the guests follow, among them WERLE. Last of all come HJALMAR EKDAL and GREGERS WERLE.*]

MRS. SØRBY [*to the servant, in passing*]. Pettersen, will you have coffee served in the music room?

PETTERSEN. Yes, Mrs. Sørby.

[*She and the two gentlemen go into the inner room and exit to the right.*]

PETTERSEN and JENSEN leave in the same way.]

A FAT GUEST [*to a balding man*]. Phew! That dinner—that was a steep bit of work!

THE BALD-HEADED GUEST. Oh, with a little good will a man can do wonders in three hours.

THE FAT GUEST. Yes, but afterward, my dear fellow, afterward.

A THIRD GUEST. I hear we can sample coffee and liqueur in the music room.

THE FAT GUEST. Fine! Then perhaps Mrs. Sørby will play us a piece.

THE BALD-HEADED GUEST [*in an undertone*]. Just so Mrs. Sørby doesn't play us to pieces.

THE FAT GUEST. Oh, now really, Berta wouldn't punish her old friends, would she? [*They laugh and enter the inner room.*]

WERLE [*in a low, depressed tone*]. I don't think anyone noticed it, Gregers.

GREGERS. What?

WERLE. Didn't you notice it either?

GREGERS. What should I have noticed?

WERLE. We were thirteen at the table.

GREGERS. Really? Were we thirteen?

WERLE [*with a glance at HJALMAR EKDAL*]. Yes—our usual number is twelve. [*To the others.*] Be so kind, gentlemen. [*He and those remaining, excepting HJALMAR and GREGERS, go out to the rear and right.*]

HJALMAR [*who has heard the conversation*]. You shouldn't have sent me the invitation, Gregers.

GREGERS. What! The party's supposed to be for *me*. And then I'm not supposed to have my best and only friend—

HJALMAR. But I don't think your father likes it. Ordinarily I never come to this house.

GREGERS. So I hear. But I had to see you and talk with you, for I'm sure to be leaving soon again. Yes, we two old classmates, we've certainly drifted a long way apart. You know, we haven't seen each other now in sixteen—seventeen years.

HJALMAR. Has it been so long?

GREGERS. Yes, all of that. Well, how have you been? You look well. You're almost becoming stout.

HJALMAR. Hm, stout is hardly the word, though I probably look more of a man than I did then.

GREGERS. Yes, you do. The outer man hasn't suffered.

HJALMAR [*in a gloomier tone*]. Ah, but the inner man! Believe me, he has a different look. You know, of course, what misery we've been through, I and my family, since the last time the two of us met.

GREGERS [*dropping his voice*]. How's it going for your father now?

HJALMAR. Oh, Gregers, let's not talk about that. My poor, unhappy father naturally lives at home with me. He's got no one else in the whole world to turn to. But this all is so terribly hard for me to talk about, you know. Tell me, instead, how you've found life up at the mill.

GREGERS. Marvelously solitary, that's what—with a good chance to mull over a great many things. Come on, let's be comfortable. [*He sits in an arm-chair by the fire and urges HJALMAR down into another by its side.*]

HJALMAR [*emotionally*]. In any case, I'm grateful that you asked me here, Gregers, because it proves you no longer have anything against me.

GREGERS [*astonished*]. How could you think that I had anything against you?

HJALMAR. In those first years you did.

GREGERS. Which first years?

HJALMAR. Right after that awful misfortune. And it was only natural you should. It was just by a hair that your own father escaped being dragged into this—oh, this ugly business.

GREGERS. And that's why I had it in for you? Whoever gave you that idea?

HJALMAR. I know you did, Gregers; it was your father himself who told me.

GREGERS [*startled*]. Father! I see. Hm—is that why I never heard from you—not a single word?

HJALMAR. Yes.

GREGERS. Not even when you went out and became a photographer.

HJALMAR. Your father said it wasn't worth writing you—about anything.

GREGERS [*looking fixedly ahead*]. No, no, maybe he was right there—But tell me, Hjalmar—do you find yourself reasonably content with things as they are?

HJALMAR [*with a small sigh*]. Oh, I suppose I do. What else can I say? At first, you can imagine, it was all rather strange for me. They were such completely different expectations that I came into. But then everything was so different. That immense, shattering misfortune for Father—the shame and the scandal, Gregers—

GREGERS [*shaken*]. Yes, yes. Of course.

HJALMAR. I couldn't dream of going on with my studies; there wasn't a penny to spare. On the contrary, debts instead—mainly to your father, I think—

GREGERS. Hm—

HJALMAR. Anyway, I thought it was best to make a clean break—and cut all the old connections. It was your father especially who advised me to; and since he'd already been so helpful to me—

GREGERS. He had?

HJALMAR. Yes, you knew that, didn't you? Where could I get the money to learn photography and fit out a studio and establish myself? I can tell you, that all adds up.

GREGERS. And all that Father paid for?

HJALMAR. Yes, Gregers, didn't you know? I understood him to say that he'd written you about it.

GREGERS. Not a word saying *he* was the one. Maybe he forgot. We've never exchanged anything but business letters. So that was Father, too—!

HJALMAR. That's right. He never wanted people to know, but he was the one. And he was also the one who put me in a position to get married. Or perhaps—didn't you know that either?

GREGERS. No, not at all. [*Takes him by the arm.*] But Hjalmar, I can't tell you how all this delights me—and disturbs me. Perhaps I've been unfair to my father—in certain ways. Yes, for all this does show good-heartedness, doesn't it? It's almost a kind of conscience—

HJALMAR. Conscience?

GREGERS. Yes, or whatever you want to call it. No, I can't tell you how glad I am to hear this about my father. So you're married, then, Hjalmar. That's further than I'll ever go. Well, I hope you're happy as a married man?

HJALMAR. Oh, absolutely. She's as capable and fine a wife as any man could wish for. And she's not entirely without culture, either.

GREGERS [*a bit surprised*]. No, I'm sure she's not.

HJALMAR. No. Life is a teacher, you see. Associating with me every day—and then there are one or two gifted people who visit us regularly. I can tell you, you wouldn't recognize Gina now.

GREGERS. Gina?

HJALMAR. Yes, Gregers, had you forgotten her name is Gina?

GREGERS. Whose name is Gina? I haven't the faintest idea—

HJALMAR. But don't you remember, she was here in this very house a while—in service?

GREGERS [*looking at him*]. You mean Gina Hansen—?

HJALMAR. Yes, of course, Gina Hansen.

GREGERS. Who was housekeeper for us that last year of Mother's illness?

HJALMAR. Exactly. But my dear Gregers, I know for sure that your father wrote you about my marriage.

GREGERS [*who has gotten up*]. Yes, of course he did. But not that—[*walks about the floor*]. Yes, wait a minute—it may well be, now that I think of it. My father's letters are always so brief. [*Sits on chair arm.*] Listen, tell me, Hjalmar—this is interesting—how did you come to know Gina?—your wife, I mean.

HJALMAR. Oh, it was all very simple. Gina didn't stay long here in the house; there was so much confusion—your mother's sickness and all. Gina couldn't stand it, so she just up and left. That was the year before your mother died—or maybe it was the same year.

GREGERS. It was the same year. And I was up at the works at the time. But what then?

HJALMAR. Well, then Gina lived at home with her mother, a Mrs. Hansen, a very capable, hardworking woman who ran a little restaurant. She also had a room for rent, a very pleasant, comfortable room.

GREGERS. And you were lucky enough to find it?

HJALMAR. Yes. Actually it was your father who suggested it to me. And it was there, you see—there that I really got to know Gina.

GREGERS. And then your engagement followed?

HJALMAR. Yes. Young people fall in love so easily—hm—

GREGERS [*getting up and pacing about a little*]. Tell me—when you became engaged—was it *then* that my father got you to—I mean, was it then that you started in learning photography?

HJALMAR. That's right. I wanted to get on and set up a home as soon as possible, and both your father and I decided that this photography idea was the most feasible one. And Gina thought so too. Yes, and you see, there was another inducement, a lucky break, in that Gina had already taken up retouching.

GREGERS. That worked out wonderfully all around.

HJALMAR [*pleased, getting up*]. Yes, isn't that so? Don't you think it's worked out wonderfully all around?

GREGERS. Yes, I must say. My father has almost been a kind of providence to you.

HJALMAR [*with feeling*]. He didn't abandon his old friend's son in a time of need. You see, he does have a heart.

MRS. SØRBY [*entering with WERLE on her arm*]. No more nonsense, my dear Mr. Werle. You mustn't stay in there any longer, staring at all those lights; it's doing you no good.

WERLE [*freeing his arm from hers and passing his hand over his eyes*]. Yes, I guess you're right about that.

[PETTERSEN and JENSEN enter with trays.]

MRS. SØRBY [*to the guests in the other room*]. Gentlemen, please—if any one wants a glass of punch, he must take the trouble to come in here.

THE FAT GUEST [*comes over to MRS. SØRBY*]. But really, is it true you've abolished our precious smoking privilege?

MRS. SØRBY. Yes. Here in Mr. Werle's sanctum, it's forbidden.

THE BALD-HEADED GUEST. When did you pass these drastic amendments to the cigar laws, Mrs. Sørby?

MRS. SØRBY. After the last dinner—when there were certain persons here who let themselves exceed all limits.

THE BALD-HEADED GUEST. And my dear Berta, one isn't permitted to exceed the limits, even a little bit?

MRS. SØRBY. Not in any instance, Mr. Balle.

[*Most of the guests have gathered in the study; the waiters are proffering glasses of punch.*]

WERLE [*to HJALMAR, over by a table*]. What is it you're poring over, Ekdal?

HJALMAR. It's only an album, Mr. Werle.

THE BALD-HEADED GUEST [*who is wandering about*]. Ah, photographs! Yes, of course, that's just the thing for you.

THE FAT GUEST [*seated in an armchair*]. Haven't you brought along some of your own?

HJALMAR. No, I haven't.

THE FAT GUEST. You really should have. It's so good for the digestion to sit and look at pictures.

THE BALD-HEADED GUEST. And then it always adds a morsel to the entertainment, you know.

A NEARSIGHTED GUEST. And all contributions are gratefully received.

MRS. SØRBY. These gentlemen mean that if one's invited for dinner, one must also work for the food, Mr. Ekdal.

THE FAT GUEST. Where the larder's superior, *that* is pure joy.

THE BALD-HEADED GUEST. My Lord, it's all in the struggle for existence—

MRS. SØRBY. How right you are! [*They continue laughing and joking.*]

GREGERS [*quietly*]. You should talk with them, Hjalmar.

HJALMAR [*with a shrug*]. What could I talk about?

THE FAT GUEST. Don't you think, Mr. Werle, that Tokay compares favorably as a healthful drink for the stomach?

WERLE [*by the fireplace*]. The Tokay you had today I can vouch for in any case; it's one of the very, very finest years. But you recognized that well enough.

THE FAT GUEST. Yes, it had a remarkably delicate flavor.

HJALMAR [*tentatively*]. Is there some difference between the years?

THE FAT GUEST [*laughing*]. Oh, that's rich!

WERLE [*smiling*]. It certainly doesn't pay to offer you a noble wine.

THE BALD-HEADED GUEST. Tokay wines are like photographs, Mr. Ekdal—sunshine is of the essence. Isn't that true?

HJALMAR. Oh yes, light is very important.

MRS. SØRBY. Exactly the same as with court officials—who push for their place in the sun too, I hear.

THE BALD-HEADED GUEST. Ouch! That was a tired quip.

THE NEARSIGHTED GUEST. The lady's performing—

THE FAT GUEST. And at our expense. [*Frowning.*] Mrs. Sørby, Mrs. Sørby!

MRS. SØRBY. Yes, but it certainly is true now that the years can vary enormously. The old vintages are the finest.

THE NEARSIGHTED GUEST. Do you count me among the old ones?

MRS. SØRBY. Oh, far from it.

THE BALD-HEADED GUEST. Ha, you see! But what about *me*, Mrs. Sørby—?

THE FAT GUEST. Yes, and me! What years would you put us among?

MRS. SØRBY. I would put you all among the sweet years, gentlemen. [*She sips a glass of punch; the guests laugh and banter with her.*]

WERLE. Mrs. Sørby always finds a way out—when she wants to. Pass your glasses, gentlemen. Pettersen, take care of them. Gregers, I think we'll have a glass together. [*GREGERS does not stir.*] Won't you join us, Ekdal? I had no chance to remember you at the table.

[*GRAABERG, the bookkeeper, peers out from the door to the offices.*]

GRAABERG. Beg pardon, Mr. Werle, but I can't get out.

WERLE. What, are you locked in again?

GRAABERG. Yes, and Flakstad's left with the keys—

WERLE. Well, then, go through here.

GRAABERG. But there's someone else—

WERLE. All right, all right, both of you. Don't be shy.

[*GRAABERG and old EKDAL come out from the office.*]

WERLE [*involuntarily*]. Oh no!

[*The laughter and small talk die among the guests. HJALMAR starts at the sight of his father, sets down his glass, and turns away toward the fireplace.*]

EKDAL [*without looking up, but bowing slightly to each side and mumbling*]. Door locked. Door locked. Beg your pardon. [*He and GRAABERG exit in back to the right.*]

WERLE [*between his teeth*]. That damned Graaberg!

GREGERS [*with open mouth, staring at HJALMAR*]. But it couldn't have been—!

THE FAT GUEST. What's going on? Who was that?

GREGERS. Oh, no one. Only the bookkeeper and somebody else.

THE NEARSIGHTED GUEST [*to HJALMAR*]. Did you know him?

HJALMAR. I don't know—I didn't notice—

THE FAT GUEST [*getting up*]. What in thunder's wrong? [*He goes over to some others, who are talking.*]

MRS. SØRBY [*whispering to the waiter*]. Slip something to him outside, something really fine.

PETTERSEN [*nodding*]. I'll see to it. [*He goes out.*]

GREGERS [*in a shocked undertone*]. Then it really was him!

HJALMAR. Yes.

GREGERS. And yet you stood here and denied you knew him!

HJALMAR [*whispering fiercely*]. But how could I—!

GREGERS. Be recognized by your father?

HJALMAR [*painfully*]. Oh, if you were in my place, then—

[*The hushed conversations among the guests now mount into a forced joviality.*]

THE BALD-HEADED GUEST [*approaching HJALMAR and GREGERS amiably*]. Ah ha! You over here, polishing up old memories from your student years? Well? Won't you smoke, Mr. Ekdal? Have a light? Oh, that's right, we're not supposed to—

HJALMAR. Thanks, I couldn't—

THE FAT GUEST. Haven't you got a neat little poem to recite for us, Mr. Ekdal? In times past you did that so nicely.

HJALMAR. I'm afraid I can't remember any.

THE FAT GUEST. Oh, that's a shame. Well, Balle, what can we find to do?

[The two men cross the floor into the other room and go out.]

HJALMAR *[somberly]*. Gregers—I'm going! When a man's felt a terrible blow from fate—you understand. Say good night to your father for me.

GREGERS. Yes, of course. Are you going straight home?

HJALMAR. Yes, why?

GREGERS. Well, I may pay you a visit later.

HJALMAR. No, you mustn't. Not to my home. My house is a sad one, Gregers—especially after a brilliant occasion like this. We can always meet somewhere in town.

MRS. SØRBY *[who has approached; in a low voice]*. Are you going, Ekdal?

HJALMAR. Yes.

MRS. SØRBY. Greet Gina.

HJALMAR. Thank you.

MRS. SØRBY. And tell her I'll stop by to see her one day soon.

HJALMAR. Yes. Thanks. *[To GREGERS.]* Stay here. I'd rather disappear without any fuss. *[He strolls around the floor, then into the other room and out to the right.]*

MRS. SØRBY *[quietly to the waiter, who has returned]*. Well, did the old man get something to take home?

PETTERSEN. Sure. I slipped him a bottle of cognac.

MRS. SØRBY. Oh, you could have found something better.

PETTERSEN. Not at all, Mrs. Sørby. He knows nothing better than cognac.

THE FAT GUEST *[in the doorway, holding a score of music]*. How about the two of us playing something, Mrs. Sørby?

MRS. SØRBY. All right. Let's.

[The guests shout approval. MRS. SØRBY and the others exit right, through the inner room. GREGERS remains standing by the fireplace. WERLE looks for something on the writing table, seeming to wish that GREGERS would leave; when he fails to stir, WERLE crosses toward the door.]

GREGERS. Father, won't you wait a moment?

WERLE *[pausing]*. What is it?

GREGERS. I must have a word with you.

WERLE. Can't it wait till we're alone?

GREGERS. No, it can't, because it just might occur that we never are alone.

WERLE *[coming closer]*. What does *that* mean?

[Distant piano music is heard from the music room during the following conversation.]

GREGERS. How could anyone here let that family decay so pitifully?

WERLE. You're referring to the Ekdals, no doubt.

GREGERS. Yes, I mean the Ekdals. Lieutenant Ekdal was once so close to you.

WERLE. Yes, worse luck, he was all too close; and for that I've paid a price these many years. He's the one I can thank for putting something of a blot on my good name and reputation.

GREGERS [*quietly*]. Was *he* really the only guilty one?

WERLE. Who else do you mean!

GREGERS. You and he were both in on buying that big stand of timber—

WERLE. But it was Ekdal, wasn't it, who made the survey of the sections—that incompetent survey? He was the one who carried out all the illegal logging on state property. In fact, he was in charge of the whole operation up there. I had no idea of what Lieutenant Ekdal was getting into.

GREGERS. Lieutenant Ekdal himself had no idea of what he was getting into.

WERLE. Very likely. But the fact remains that he was convicted and I was acquitted.

GREGERS. Yes, I'm aware that no proof was found.

WERLE. Acquittal is acquittal. Why do you rake up this ugly old story that's given me gray hair before my time? Is this what you've been brooding about all those years up there? I can assure you, Gregers—here in town the whole business has been forgotten long ago—as far as I'm concerned.

GREGERS. But that miserable Ekdal family!

WERLE. Seriously, what would you have me do for these people? When Ekdal was let out, he was a broken man, beyond any help. There are people in this world who plunge to the bottom when they've hardly been winged, and they never come up again. Take my word for it, Gregers; I've done everything I could, short of absolutely compromising myself and arousing all kinds of suspicion and gossip—

GREGERS. Suspicion—? So that's it.

WERLE. I've gotten Ekdal copying jobs from the office, and I pay him much, much more than his work is worth—

GREGERS [*without looking at him*]. Hm. No doubt.

WERLE. You're laughing? Maybe you think what I'm saying isn't true? There's certainly nothing to show in my books; I don't record such payments.

GREGERS [*with a cold smile*]. No. I'm sure that certain payments are best left unrecorded.

WERLE [*surprised*]. What do you mean by *that*?

GREGERS [*plucking up his courage*]. Did you record what it cost you to have Hjalmar Ekdal study photography?

WERLE. I? Why should I?

GREGERS. I know now it was you who paid for that. And now I know, too, that it was you who set him up so comfortably in business.

WERLE. Well, and I suppose this still means that I've done nothing for the Ekdals! I can assure you, those people have already cost me enough expense.

GREGERS. Have you recorded any of the expenses?

WERLE. Why do you ask that?

GREGERS. Oh, there are reasons. Listen, tell me—the time when you developed such warmth for your old friend's son—wasn't that just when he was planning to marry?

WERLE. How the devil—how, after so many years, do you expect me—?

GREGERS. You wrote me a letter then—a business letter, naturally; and in a postscript it said, brief as could be, that Hjalmar Ekdal had gotten married to a Miss Hansen.

WERLE. Yes, that's right; that was her name.

GREGERS. But you never said that this Miss Hansen was Gina Hansen—our former housekeeper.

WERLE [*with a derisive, yet uneasy laugh*]. No, it just never occurred to me that you'd be so very interested in our former housekeeper.

GREGERS. I wasn't. But—[*dropping his voice*] there were others in the house who were quite interested in her.

WERLE. What do you mean by that? [*Storming at him.*] You're not referring to me!

GREGERS [*quietly but firmly*]. Yes, I'm referring to you.

WERLE. And you dare—! You have the insolence—! How could he, that ungrateful dog, that—photographer; how could he have the gall to make such insinuations?

GREGERS. Hjalmar hasn't breathed a word of it. I don't think he has the shadow of a doubt about all this.

WERLE. Then where did you get it from? Who could have said such a thing?

GREGERS. My poor, unhappy mother said it—the last time I saw her.

WERLE. Your mother! Yes, I might have guessed. She and you—you always stuck together. It was she who, right from the start, turned your mind against me.

GREGERS. No. It was everything she had to suffer and endure until she broke down and died so miserably.

WERLE. Oh, she had nothing to suffer and endure—no more, at least, than so many others. But you can't get anywhere with sick, high-strung people. I've certainly learned that. Now you're going around suspecting that sort of thing, digging up all manner of old rumors and slanders against your own father. Now listen, Gregers, I really think that at your age you could occupy yourself more usefully.

GREGERS. Yes, all in due time.

WERLE. Then your mind might be clearer than it seems to be now. What can it lead to, you up there at the works, slaving away year in and year out like a common clerk, never taking a penny over your month's salary. It's pure stupidity.

GREGERS. Yes, if only I were so sure of that.

WERLE. I understand you well enough. You want to be independent, without obligation to me. But here's the very opportunity for you to become independent, your own man in every way.

GREGERS. So? And by what means—?

WERLE. When I wrote you that it was essential you come to town now, immediately—hmm—

GREGERS. Yes. What is it you really want of me? I've been waiting all day to find out.

WERLE. I'm suggesting that you come into the firm as a partner.

GREGERS. !! In your firm? As a partner?

WERLE. Yes. It wouldn't mean we'd need to be together much. You could take over the offices here in town, and then I'd move up to the mill.

GREGERS. You *would*?

WERLE. Yes. You see, I can't take on work now the way I once could. I have to spare my eyes, Gregers; they're beginning to fail.

GREGERS. They've always been weak.

WERLE. Not like this. Besides—circumstances may make it desirable for me to live up there—at least for a while.

GREGERS. I never dreamed of anything like this.

WERLE. Listen, Gregers, there are so very many things that keep us apart, and yet, you know—we're father and son still. I think we should be able to reach some kind of understanding.

GREGERS. Just on the surface, is that what you mean?

WERLE. Well, at least that would be something. Think it over, Gregers. Don't you think it ought to be possible? Eh?

GREGERS [*looking at him coldly*]. There's something behind all this.

WERLE. How so?

GREGERS. It might be that somehow you're using me.

WERLE. In a relationship as close as ours, one can always be of use to the other.

GREGERS. Yes, so they say.

WERLE. I'd like to have you home with me now for a while. I'm a lonely man, Gregers; I've always felt lonely—all my life through, but particularly now when the years are beginning to press me. I need to have someone around—

GREGERS. You have Mrs. Sørby.

WERLE. Yes, I do—and she's become, you might say, almost indispensable. She's witty, even-tempered; she livens up the house—and that's what I need so badly.

GREGERS. Well, then, you've got everything the way you want it.

WERLE. Yes, but I'm afraid it can't go on. The world is quick to make inferences about a woman in her position. Yes, I was going to say, a man doesn't gain by it either.

GREGERS. Oh, when a man gives dinner parties like yours, he can certainly take a few risks.

WERLE. Yes, Gregers, but what about her? I'm afraid she won't put up with it much longer. And even if she did—even if, out of her feeling for me, she ignored the gossip and the backbiting and so on—do you still think, Gregers, you with your sharp sense of justice—

GREGERS [*cutting him off*]. Tell me short and sweet just one thing. Are you planning to marry her?

WERLE. And if I *were* planning such a thing—what then?

GREGERS. Yes, that's what I'm asking. What then?

WERLE. Would you be so irreconcilably set against it?

GREGERS. No, not at all. Not in any way.

WERLE. Well, I really didn't know whether, perhaps out of regard for your dead mother's memory—

GREGERS. I am not high-strung.

WERLE. Well, you may or may not be, but in any case you've taken a great load off my mind. I'm really very happy that I can count on your support in this.

GREGERS [*staring intently at him*]. Now I see how you want to use me.

WERLE. Use you! That's no way to talk!

GREGERS. Oh, let's not be squeamish in our choice of words. At least, not when it's man to man. [*He laughs brusquely*.] So that's it! That's why I—

damn it all!—had to make my personal appearance in town. On account of Mrs. Sørby, family life is in order in this house. Tableau of father with son! That's something new, all right!

WERLE. How dare you speak in that tone!

GREGERS. When has there ever been family life here? Never, as long as I can remember. But *now*, of course, there's need for a little of that. For who could deny what a fine impression it would make to hear that the son—on the wings of piety—came flying home to the aging father's wedding feast. What's left then of all the stories about what the poor dead woman suffered and endured? Not a scrap. Her own son ground them to dust.

WERLE. Gregers—I don't think there's a man in this world you hate as much as me.

GREGERS. I've seen you at too close quarters.

WERLE. You've seen me with your mother's eyes. [*Dropping his voice.*] But you should remember that those eyes were—clouded at times.

GREGERS [*faltering*]. I know what you mean. But who bears the guilt for Mother's fatal weakness? You, and all those—! The last of them was that female that Hjalmar Ekdal was fixed up with when you had no more—ugh!

WERLE [*shrugs*]. Word for word, as if I were hearing your mother.

GREGERS [*paying no attention to him*]. . . . and there he sits right now, he with his great, guileless, childlike mind plunged in deception—living under the same roof with that creature, not knowing that what he calls home is built on a lie. [*Coming a step closer.*] When I look back on all you've done, it's as if I looked out over a battlefield with broken human beings on every side.

WERLE. I almost think the gulf is too great between us.

GREGERS [*bows stiffly*]. So I've observed; therefore I'll take my hat and go.

WERLE. You're going? Out of this house?

GREGERS. Yes. Because now at least I can see a purpose to live for.

WERLE. What purpose is that?

GREGERS. You'd only laugh if you heard it.

WERLE. A lonely man doesn't laugh so easily, Gregers.

GREGERS [*pointing toward the inner room*]. Look—your gentleman friends are playing blindman's buff with Mrs. Sørby. Good night and goodbye.

[*He goes out at the right rear. Laughter and joking from the company, which moves into view in the inner room.*]

WERLE [*muttering contemptuously after GREGERS*]. Huh! Poor fool—and he says he's not high-strung!

ACT II

HJALMAR EKDAL's studio. The room, which is fairly spacious, appears to be a loft. To the right is a sloping roof with great panes of glass, half hidden by a blue curtain. In the far right corner is the entrance; nearer on the same side, a door to the living room. Similarly, at the left there are two doors, and between these an iron stove. At the back is a wide double door, designed to slide back to the sides. The studio is simply but comfortably furnished and decorated.

Between the right-hand doors, slightly away from the wall, stands a sofa beside a table and some chairs; on the table is a lighted lamp with a shade; by the stove an old armchair. Photographic apparatus and equipment of various sorts are set up here and there in the room. At the left of the double doors stands a book-case containing a few books, small boxes and flasks of chemicals, various tools, implements, and other objects. Photographs and such small articles as brushes, paper, and the like lie on the table.

GINA EKDAL sits on a chair by the table, sewing. HEDVIG sits on the sofa, hands shading her eyes, thumbs in her ears, reading a book.

GINA [*having glanced over several times at HEDVIG, as if with anxiety*]. Hedvig! [HEDVIG does not hear.]

GINA [*louder*]. Hedvig!

HEDVIG [*removing her hands and looking up*]. Yes, Mother?

GINA. Hedvig, dear, you mustn't sit and read anymore.

HEDVIG. Oh, but Mother, can't I please read a little longer? Just a little!

GINA. No, no—you must set the book down. Your father doesn't like it; he never reads in the evening.

HEDVIG [*closing the book*]. No, Daddy's no great one for reading.

GINA [*lays her sewing aside and takes a pencil and a small notebook from the table*]. Do you remember how much we spent for butter today?

HEDVIG. It was one sixty-five.

GINA. That's right. [*Making a note.*] It's awful how much butter gets used in this house. And then so much for smoked sausage, and for cheese—let me see—[*making more notes*] and so much for ham—hmm. [*Adds.*] Yes, that adds right up to—

HEDVIG. And then there's the beer.

GINA. Yes, of course. [*Makes another note.*] It mounts up—but it can't be helped.

HEDVIG. Oh, but you and I had no hot food for dinner, 'cause Daddy was out.

GINA. No, and that's to the good. What's more, I also took in eight crowns fifty for photographs.

HEDVIG. No! Was it that much?

GINA. Exactly eight crowns fifty.

[*Silence. GINA again picks up her sewing. HEDVIG takes paper and pencil and starts to draw, shading her eyes with her left hand.*]

HEDVIG. Isn't it something to think that Daddy's at a big dinner party at old Mr. Werle's?

GINA. You can't really say that he's at old Mr. Werle's. It was his son who sent him the invitation. [*After a pause.*] We have nothing to do with old Mr. Werle.

HEDVIG. I can hardly wait for Daddy to come home. He promised he'd ask Mrs. Sørby about bringing me a treat.

GINA. Yes, you can bet there are lots of treats to be had in *that* house.

HEDVIG [*again drawing*]. Besides, I'm a little hungry, too.

[*Old EKDAL, with a bundle of papers under his arm and another bundle in his coat pocket, comes in through the hall door.*]

GINA. My, but you're late today, Grandfather.

EKDAL. They'd locked the office. Had to wait for Graaberg. And then I had to go through—uhh.

GINA. Did they give you something new to copy, Grandfather?

EKDAL. This whole pile. Just look.

GINA. That's fine.

HEDVIG. And you've got a bundle in your pocket, too.

EKDAL. Oh? Nonsense; that's nothing. [*Puts his cane away in the corner.*] Here's work for a good spell, Gina, this here. [*Pulls one of the double doors slightly open.*] Shh! [*Peers into the room a moment, then carefully closes the door again.*] He, he! They're sound asleep, the lot of them. And she's bedded down in the basket all on her own. He, he!

HEDVIG. Are you sure she won't be cold in the basket, Grandpa?

EKDAL. What a thought! Cold? In all that straw? [*Goes toward the farther door on the left.*] I'll find some matches in here, eh?

GINA. The matches are on the bureau.

[*EKDAL goes into his room.*]

HEDVIG. It's wonderful that Grandpa got all that copying to do.

GINA. Yes, poor old Father; he'll earn himself a little pocket money.

HEDVIG. And he also won't be able to sit the whole morning down in that horrid Mrs. Eriksen's café.

GINA. That too, yes. [*A short silence.*]

HEDVIG. Do you think they're still at the dinner table?

GINA. Lord only knows; it may well be.

HEDVIG. Just think, all the lovely food Daddy's eaten! I'm sure he'll be happy and content when he comes. Don't you think so, Mother?

GINA. Of course. Imagine if we could tell him now that we'd rented out the room.

HEDVIG. But that's not necessary tonight.

GINA. Oh, it could well come in handy, you know. It's no good to us as it is.

HEDVIG. No, I mean it's not necessary because tonight Daddy's feeling good. It's better we have news about the room some other time.

GINA [*looking over at her*]. Are you glad when you have something nice to tell your father when he comes home at night?

HEDVIG. Yes, for things here are pleasanter then.

GINA [*reflecting*]. Well, there's something to that.

[*Old EKDAL comes in again and starts out through the nearer door to the left.*]

GINA [*half turning in her chair*]. Does Grandfather want something from the kitchen?

EKDAL. I do, yes. Don't stir. [*He goes out.*]

GINA. He never fusses with the fire out there. [*After a moment.*] Hedvig, go see what he's doing.

[*EKDAL reenters with a small jug of steaming water.*]

HEDVIG. Are you after hot water, Grandpa?

EKDAL. Yes, I am. Need it for something. Have to write, and the ink is caked thick as porridge—hmm.

GINA. But you ought to have supper first, Grandfather. It's all set and waiting in there.

EKDAL. Never mind about the supper, Gina. Terribly busy, I tell you. I don't want anybody coming into my room—nobody. Hmm. [*He goes into his room. GINA and HEDVIG exchange glances.*]

GINA [*lowering her voice*]. Where do you figure he's gotten money?

HEDVIG. He must have got it from Graaberg.

GINA. Not a chance. Graaberg always sends the pay to me.

HEDVIG. Maybe he got a bottle somewhere on credit.

GINA. Poor Grandpa, no one'll give him credit.

[HJALMAR EKDAL, wearing an overcoat and a gray felt hat, enters from the right.]

GINA [*dropping her sewing and getting up*]. Ah, Hjalmar, here you are!

HEDVIG [*jumping up at the same time*]. At last you're home, Daddy!

HJALMAR [*putting his hat down*]. Yes, most of them were leaving.

HEDVIG. So early?

HJALMAR. Yes, it was only a dinner party. [*Starts to remove his overcoat.*]

GINA. Let me help you.

HEDVIG. Me too.

[*They take off his coat; GINA hangs it up on the rear wall.*]

HEDVIG. Were there many there, Daddy?

HJALMAR. Oh no, not many. We were some twelve, fourteen people at the table.

GINA. And you got to talk with every one of them?

HJALMAR. Oh yes, a little, though Gregers rather monopolized me.

GINA. Is Gregers as ugly as ever?

HJALMAR. Well, he doesn't look any better. Isn't the old man home?

HEDVIG. Yes, Grandpa's inside, writing.

HJALMAR. Did he say anything?

GINA. No, what should he say?

HJALMAR. Didn't he mention anything of—I thought I heard that he'd been with Graaberg. I'll go in and have a word with him.

GINA. No, no, don't bother.

HJALMAR. Why not? Did he say he wouldn't see me?

GINA. He doesn't want anyone in there this evening.

HEDVIG [*making signals*]. Uh—uh!

GINA [*not noticing*]. He's already been out here and gotten hot water.

HJALMAR. Aha! Is he—?

GINA. Yes, exactly.

HJALMAR. Good Lord, my poor old white-haired father! Well, let him be, enjoying life's pleasures as he may.

[*Old EKDAL in a bathrobe, smoking a pipe, enters from his room.*]

EKDAL. Home, eh? Thought it was your voice I heard.

HJALMAR. I just arrived.

EKDAL. You didn't see me at all, did you?

HJALMAR. No, but they said you'd been through—so I thought I'd follow after.

EKDAL. Hm, good of you, Hjalmar. Who were they, all those people?

HJALMAR. Oh, different sorts. There was Flor—he's at the court—and Balle and Kaspersen and, uh—I forget his name, but people at court, all of them—

EKDAL [*nodding*]. Listen to that, Gina! He travels only in the best circles.

GINA. Yes, it's real elegant in that house now.

HEDVIG. Did the court people sing, Daddy? Or give readings?

HJALMAR. No, they just babbled away. Of course they wanted *me* to recite for them, but I couldn't see that.

EKDAL. You couldn't see that, eh?

GINA. That you could easily have done.

HJALMAR. Never. One mustn't be a doormat for every passing foot. [*Walking about the room.*] At least, that's not my way.

EKDAL. No, no, that's not for Hjalmar.

HJALMAR. I don't know why I should always provide the entertainment, when I'm out in society so rarely. Let the others make an effort. There those fellows go from one banquet to the next, eating and drinking day in and day out. So let them do their tricks in return for all the good food they get.

GINA. But you didn't say that there?

HJALMAR [*humming*]. Um—um—um—they were told a thing or two.

EKDAL. Right to the nobility!

HJALMAR. I don't see why not. [*Casually.*] Later we had a little quibble about Tokay.

EKDAL. Tokay, you mean? That's a fine wine, that.

HJALMAR [*coming to a halt*]. On occasion. But I must tell you that not all years are equally good. Everything depends strictly on how much sun the grapes have had.

GINA. Really? Oh, Hjalmar, you know everything.

EKDAL. And they could argue about that?

HJALMAR. They tried to. But then they were informed that it's exactly the same with court officials. Among them as well, all years are not equally fine—it was said.

GINA. The things you think of!

EKDAL. He—he! So you served that up to them, eh?

HJALMAR. Smack between the eyes they got it.

EKDAL. Hear, Gina! He laid that one smack between the eyes of the nobility.

GINA. Just think, smack between the eyes.

HJALMAR. That's right. But I don't want a lot of talk about this. One doesn't speak of such things. Everything really went off in the most friendly spirit, naturally. They're all pleasant, genial people. How could I hurt their feelings? Never!

EKDAL. But smack between the eyes—

HEDVIG [*ingratiatingly*]. How nice to see you in evening clothes, Daddy. You look so well in them.

HJALMAR. Yes, don't you think so? And this one here really fits very well. It's almost as if it were made for me. A bit snug under the arms, maybe—help me, Hedvig. [*Takes off the coat.*] I'd rather wear my jacket. What did you do with my jacket, Gina?

GINA. Here it is. [*Brings the jacket and helps him into it.*]

HJALMAR. There! Now don't forget to give Molvik his coat back first thing in the morning.

GINA [*putting it away*]. I'll take care of it.

HJALMAR [*stretching*]. Ah, but this feels much more comfortable. This

kind of free and easy dress suits my whole personality better. Don't you think so, Hedvig?

HEDVIG. Yes, Daddy.

HJALMAR. And when I pull my necktie out into a pair of flowing ends—so! Look! What then?

HEDVIG. Yes, it goes so well with your moustache and your long, curly hair.

HJALMAR. Curly? I wouldn't say it's that. I'd call it wavy.

HEDVIG. Yes, but it is so curly.

HJALMAR. No—wavy.

HEDVIG [*after a moment, tugs at his sleeve*]. Daddy!

HJALMAR. What is it?

HEDVIG. Oh, you know what.

HJALMAR. No, I don't. Honestly.

HEDVIG [*laughing fretfully*]. Come on, Daddy, don't tease me any longer.

HJALMAR. But what is it, then?

HEDVIG [*shaking him*]. Silly! Out with it, Daddy. You know—all the treats you promised me.

HJALMAR. Oh—no! How did I ever forget that?

HEDVIG. No, you can't fool me. Shame on you! Where have you hidden it?

HJALMAR. So help me if I didn't forget. But wait a minute! I've got something else for you, Hedvig. [*Goes over and rummages in his coat pockets.*]

HEDVIG [*jumping and clapping her hands*]. Oh, Mother, Mother!

GINA. You see, if you're only patient enough, then—

HJALMAR [*returning with a piece of paper*]. See, here we have it.

HEDVIG. That? But that's just a piece of paper.

HJALMAR. It's the bill of fare, the complete bill of fare. Here it says "menu"; that means "bill of fare."

HEDVIG. Don't you have anything else?

HJALMAR. I forgot to bring anything else, I tell you. But take my word for it: it's bad business, this doting on sugar candy. Now, if you'll sit down at the table and read the menu aloud, I'll describe for you just how each dish tasted. How's that, Hedvig?

HEDVIG [*swallowing her tears*]. Thanks. [*She sits, but does not read. GINA makes gestures at her, which HJALMAR notices.*]

HJALMAR [*pacing about the floor*]. What incredible things a family breadwinner is asked to remember; and if he forgets even the tiniest detail—immediately he's met with sour faces. Well he has to get used to that, too. [*Pauses at the stove beside EKDAL.*] Have you looked inside this evening, Father?

EKDAL. Oh, that you can be sure of. She's gone into the basket.

HJALMAR. No! Into the basket? Then she's begun to get used to it.

EKDAL. Yes. You see, it was just as I predicted. But now there are some little things to do—

HJALMAR. Some improvements, eh?

EKDAL. But they've got to be done, you know.

HJALMAR. All right, let's talk a bit about the improvements, Father. Come, we'll sit here on the sofa.

EKDAL. Very good. Umm—think I'll fill my pipe first. Needs cleaning, too. Hmm. [*He goes into his room.*]

GINA [*smiling at HJALMAR*]. Clean his pipe!

HJALMAR. Ah, now, Gina, let him be. Poor old derelict. Yes, the improvements—it's best we get those off our hands tomorrow.

GINA. Tomorrow you won't have time, Hjalmar—

HEDVIG [*interrupting*]. Oh yes, he will, Mother!

GINA. Remember those prints that need retouching. They've been called for so many times already.

HJALMAR. Oh yes, those prints again. They'll be finished in no time. Did any new orders come in?

GINA. No such luck. For tomorrow, I have nothing except those two portrait sittings you know about.

HJALMAR. Nothing else? Ah, well, if people won't even try, then naturally—

GINA. But what else can I do? I've put ads in the papers time and again.

HJALMAR. Yes, ads, ads—you see what a help they are. And of course nobody's been to look at the spare room either?

GINA. No, not yet.

HJALMAR. That was to be expected. If one doesn't keep wide awake—Gina, you've simply got to pull yourself together.

HEDVIG [*going to him*]. Let me bring you your flute, Daddy.

HJALMAR. No, no flute. I want no pleasures in this world. [*Pacing about.*] Ah, yes, work—I'll be deep in work tomorrow; there'll be no lack of *that*. I'll sweat and slave as long as my strength holds out—

GINA. But Hjalmar dear, I didn't mean it that way.

HEDVIG. Can't I get you a bottle of beer, then?

HJALMAR. Absolutely not. There's nothing I need. [*Stopping.*] Beer? Did you say beer?

HEDVIG [*vivaciously*]. Yes, Daddy, lovely cool beer.

HJALMAR. Well—if you really insist, I suppose you could bring in a bottle.

GINA. Yes, do that. Then we'll have it cozy.

[*HEDVIG runs toward the kitchen door. HJALMAR by the stove stops her, gazes at her, clasps her about the head and hugs her to him.*]

HJALMAR. Hedvig! Hedvig!

HEDVIG [*with tears of joy*]. Oh, my dearest Daddy!

HJALMAR. No, don't call me that. There I sat, helping myself at a rich man's table, gorging myself with all good things—! I could at least have remembered—

GINA [*sitting at the table*]. Oh, nonsense, Hjalmar.

HJALMAR. Yes, I could! But you mustn't be too hard on me. You both know I love you anyway.

HEDVIG [*throwing her arms around him*]. And we love you too, so much!

HJALMAR. And if I should seem unreasonable at times, then—good Lord—remember that I am a man assailed by a host of cares. Ah, yes! [*Drying his eyes.*] No beer at a time like this. Bring me my flute. [*HEDVIG runs to the book-case and fetches it.*] Thank you. There—so. With flute in hand, and you two close by me—ah!

[*HEDVIG sits at the table by GINA, HJALMAR walks back and forth, then forcefully begins to play a Bohemian folk dance, but in a slow elegiac tempo*]

with sentimental intonation. After a moment he breaks off the melody and extends his left hand to GINA.]

HJALMAR [*with feeling*]. So what if we skimp and scrape along under this roof, Gina—it's still our home. And I'll say this: it's good to be here. [*He starts playing again; immediately there comes a knock on the hall door.*]

GINA [*getting up*]. Shh, Hjalmar. I think someone's there.

HJALMAR [*returning the flute to the bookcase*]. What, again! [*GINA goes over and opens the door.*]

GREGERS WERLE [*out in the hallway*]. Excuse me—

GINA [*drawing back slightly*]. Oh!

GREGERS. But doesn't Mr. Ekdal, the photographer, live here?

GINA. Yes, that's right.

HJALMAR [*going toward the door*]. Gregers! Is it really you? Well, come right in.

GREGERS [*entering*]. I said I was going to drop in on you.

HJALMAR. But tonight? Have you left the party?

GREGERS. Left both party and family home. Good evening, Mrs. Ekdal. I don't know whether you recognize me?

GINA. Oh yes. Young Mr. Werle is not so hard to recognize.

GREGERS. No. I look like my mother, and you remember her, no doubt.

HJALMAR. Did you say you'd left your home?

GREGERS. Yes, I've moved into a hotel.

HJALMAR. I see. Well, now that you've come, take off your things and sit down.

GREGERS. Thank you. [*Removes his overcoat. He is dressed now in a simple grey suit of somewhat rustic cut.*]

HJALMAR. Here, on the sofa. Make yourself at home.

[*GREGERS sits on the sofa, HJALMAR on a chair at the table.*]

GREGERS [*looking around*]. So this is where you work, then, Hjalmar. And you live here as well.

HJALMAR. This is the studio, as you can see—

GINA. There's more room in here, so we like it better.

HJALMAR. We had a better place before; but this apartment has one great advantage: it has such wonderful adjoining rooms—

GINA. And so we have a room on the other side of the hall that we can rent out.

GREGERS [*to HJALMAR*]. Ah, then you have lodgers, too.

HJALMAR. No, not yet. It's not that easy, you know. One has to keep wide awake. [*To HEDVIG.*] But how about that beer?

[*HEDVIG nods and goes into the kitchen.*]

GREGERS. So that's your daughter, then?

HJALMAR. Yes, that's Hedvig.

GREGERS. An only child?

HJALMAR. She's the only one, yes. She's the greatest joy of our lives, and —[*lowering his voice*] also our deepest sorrow, Gregers.

GREGERS. What do you mean?

HJALMAR. Yes. You see, there's the gravest imminent danger of her losing her sight.

GREGERS. Going blind!

HJALMAR. Yes. So far only the first signs are present, and things may go well for a while. All the same, the doctor has warned us. It will come inevitably.

GREGERS. What a dreadful misfortune! How did this happen?

HJALMAR [*sighing*]. Heredity, most likely.

GREGERS [*startled*]. Heredity?

GINA. Hjalmar's mother also had bad eyes.

HJALMAR. Yes, so my father says. I don't remember her.

GREGERS. Poor child. And how is she taking it?

HJALMAR. Oh, you can well imagine, we haven't the heart to tell her. She suspects nothing. She's carefree, gay, and singing like a tiny bird, she's fluttering into life's eternal night. [*Overcome.*] Oh, it's a brutal blow for me, Gregers.

[HEDVIG *brings in beer and glasses on a tray, which she sets down on the table.*]

HJALMAR [*stroking her head*]. Thanks. Thanks, Hedvig.

[HEDVIG *puts her arms around his neck and whispers in his ear.*]

HJALMAR. No, No bread and butter now. [*Looking over.*] Or maybe Gregers will have a piece?

GREGERS [*making a gesture of refusal*]. No. No, thanks.

HJALMAR [*his tone still mournful*]. Well, you can bring in a little anyway. If you have a crust, that would be fine. And please, put enough butter on, too.

[HEDVIG *nods contentedly and returns to the kitchen.*]

GREGERS [*after following her with his eyes*]. In every other respect she looks so strong and healthy.

GINA. Yes, thank God, she's got nothing else wrong with her.

GREGERS. She'll certainly look like you when she grows up, Mrs. Ekdal. How old is she now?

GINA. Hedvig is almost fourteen exactly; her birthday's the day after tomorrow.

GREGERS. Rather tall for her age.

GINA. Yes, she's shot right up this past year.

GREGERS. Nothing like the growth of a child to show us how old we're getting. How long is it you've been married now?

GINA. We've been married now for—yes, near fifteen years.

GREGERS. No, truly! Has it been that long?

GINA [*looking at him, becoming wary*]. Yes, no doubt about it.

HJALMAR. That's right. Fifteen years, short a few months. [*Changing the subject.*] They must have been long years for you, Gregers, up there at the works.

GREGERS. They were long while I was living them—but now I scarcely know what became of the time.

[*Old EKDAL enters from his room, without his pipe, but with his old military cap on his head; his walk a bit unsteady.*]

EKDAL. There, now, Hjalmar. Now we can settle down and talk about that—umm. What was it again?

HJALMAR [*going toward him*]. Father, someone is here. Gregers Werle. I don't know if you remember him.

EKDAL [*regarding GREGERS, who has gotten up*]. Werle? That's the son, isn't it? What does he want with me?

HJALMAR. Nothing; it's me he's come to see.

EKDAL. Well, then nothing's up, eh?

HJALMAR. No, of course not.

EKDAL [*swinging his arms*]. It's not that I'm scared of anything, you know, but—

GREGERS [*going over to him*]. I just want to greet you from your old hunting grounds, Lieutenant Ekdal.

EKDAL. Hunting grounds?

GREGERS. Yes, up there around the Hoidal works.

EKDAL. Oh, up there. Yes, I was well known there once.

GREGERS. In those days you were a tremendous hunter.

EKDAL. So I was. Still am, maybe. You're looking at my uniform. I ask nobody permission to wear it in here. As long as I don't walk in the streets with it— [*HEDVIG brings a plate of buttered bread, which she places on the table.*]

HJALMAR. Sit down, Father, and have a glass of beer. Help yourself, Gregers.

[*EKDAL stumbles, muttering, over to the sofa. GREGERS sits on the chair nearest him, HJALMAR on the other side of GREGERS. GINA sits near the table and sews; HEDVIG stands beside her father.*]

GREGERS. Do you remember, Lieutenant Ekdal, when Hjalmar and I would come up to visit you summers and at Christmas?

EKDAL. Did you? No, no, no, I don't recall. But I'll tell you something: I've been a first-rate hunter. Bear—I've shot them, too. Shot nine in all.

GREGERS [*looking sympathetically at him*]. And now you hunt no more.

EKDAL. Oh, I wouldn't say *that*, boy. Get some hunting in now and then. Yes, but not that kind there. The woods, you see—the woods, the woods— [*Drinks.*] How do the woods look up there?

GREGERS. Not so fine as in your time. They've been cut into heavily.

EKDAL. Cut into? [*More quietly, as if in fear.*] It's a dangerous business, that. It catches up with you. The woods take revenge.

HJALMAR [*filling his glass*]. Here, a little more, Father.

GREGERS. How can a man like you—such an outdoorsman—live in the middle of a stuffy city, cooped up in these four walls?

EKDAL [*half laughs and glances at HJALMAR*]. Oh, it's not so bad here. Not bad at all.

GREGERS. But all those other things, the very roots of your soul—that cool, sweeping breeze, that free life of the moors and forests, among the animals and birds—?

EKDAL [*smiling*]. Hjalmar, should we show him?

HJALMAR [*quickly and a bit embarrassed*]. No, no, Father, not tonight.

GREGERS. What's that he wants to show me?

HJALMAR. Oh, it's only a sort of—you can see it some other time.

GREGERS [*speaking again to EKDAL*]. Yes, my point was this, Lieutenant Ekdal, that now you might as well return with me to the works, for I'm sure to be leaving very soon. Without a doubt, you could get some copying to do up there; and here you've nothing in the world to stir your blood and make you happy.

EKDAL [*staring at him, astonished*]. I have nothing, nothing at all—!

GREGERS. Of course you have Hjalmar, but then again, he has his own.

And a man like you, who's always felt himself so drawn to whatever is free and wild—

EKDAL [*striking the table*]. Hjalmar, now he's got to see it!

HJALMAR. But Father, is it worth it now? It's dark, you know—

EKDAL. Nonsense! There's moonlight. [*Getting up.*] I say he's got to see it. Let me by. Come and help me, Hjalmar!

HEDVIG. Oh yes, do that, Father!

HJALMAR [*getting up.*]. Well—all right.

GREGERS [*to GINA*]. What's this all about?

GINA. Oh, you really mustn't expect anything special.

[EKDAL and HJALMAR have gone to the back wall to push aside the two halves of the double door; HEDVIG helps her grandfather, while GREGERS remains standing by the sofa and GINA sits, imperturbably sewing. The doorway opens on an extensive, irregular loft room with many nooks and corners, and two separate chimney shafts ascending through it. Clear moonlight streams through skylights into certain parts of the large room; others lie in deep shadow.]

EKDAL [*to GREGERS*]. All the way over here, please.

GREGERS [*going over to them*]. What is it, then?

EKDAL. See for yourself—hmm.

HJALMAR [*somewhat self-conscious*]. All this belongs to Father, you understand.

GREGERS [*peering in at the doorway*]. So you keep poultry, Lieutenant Ekdal!

EKDAL. I'll say we keep poultry! They're roosting now; but you just ought to see our poultry by daylight!

HEDVIG. And then there's a—

EKDAL. Shh, shh—don't say anything yet.

GREGERS. And you've got pigeons too, I see.

EKDAL. Oh yes, it might just be we've got some pigeons. They have their nesting boxes up there under the eaves; pigeons like to perch high, you know.

HJALMAR. They're not ordinary pigeons, all of them.

EKDAL. Ordinary! No, I should say not! We have tumblers, and we have a couple of pouters also. But look here! Can you see that hutch over there by the wall?

GREGERS. Yes. What do you use that for?

EKDAL. The rabbits sleep there at night, boy.

GREGERS. Well, so you have rabbits too?

EKDAL. Yes, what the devil do you think we have but rabbits! He asks if we have rabbits, Hjalmar! Hmm! But now listen, this is really something! This is it! Out of the way, Hedvig. Stand right here—that's it—and look straight down there. Do you see a basket there with straw in it?

GREGERS. Yes, and there's a bird nesting in the basket.

EKDAL. Hmm! "A bird"—

GREGERS. Isn't it a duck?

EKDAL [*hurt*]. Yes, of course it's a duck.

HJALMAR. But what *kind* of duck?

HEDVIG. It's not just any old duck—

EKDAL. Shh!

GREGERS. And it's no exotic breed, either.

EKDAL. No, Mr.—Werle, it's not any exotic breed—because it's a wild duck.

GREGERS. No, is it really? A wild duck?

EKDAL. Oh yes, that's what it is. That "bird" as you said—that's a wild duck. That's our wild duck, boy.

HEDVIG. My wild duck—I own it.

GREGERS. And it can survive up here indoors? And do well?

EKDAL. You've got to understand, she's got a trough of water to splash around in.

HJALMAR. Fresh water every other day.

GINA [*turning to HJALMAR*]. Hjalmar dear, it's freezing cold in here now.

EKDAL. Hmm, let's close up, then. Doesn't pay to disturb their rest either. Lend a hand, Hedvig dear. [*HJALMAR and HEDVIG push the double doors together.*] Another time you can get a proper look at her. [*Sits in the armchair by the stove.*] Oh, they're most curious, the wild ducks, you know.

GREGERS. But how did you capture it, Lieutenant Ekdal?

EKDAL. Didn't capture it myself. There's a certain man here in town we can thank for it.

GREGERS [*starts slightly*]. That man—it wouldn't be my father?

EKDAL. Exactly right—your father. Hmm.

HJALMAR. It was odd you were able to guess that, Gregers.

GREGERS. Well, you said before that you owed Father for so many different things, so I thought here too—

GINA. But we didn't get the duck from Mr. Werle himself—

EKDAL. We might just as well thank Haakon Werle for her anyhow, Gina. [*To GREGERS.*] He was out in his boat—follow me?—and he shot for her, but he sees so bad now, your father, that—hm—he only winged her.

GREGERS. I see. She took some shot in her body.

HJALMAR. Yes, some one, two—three pieces.

HEDVIG. She got it under the wing, and so she couldn't fly.

GREGERS. Ah, so she dived right for the bottom, eh?

EKDAL [*sleepily, with a thick voice*]. You can bet on that. They always do, the wild ducks—streak for the bottom, deep as they can get, boy—bite right into the weeds and sea moss—and all that devil's beard that grows down there. And then they never come up again.

GREGERS. But Lieutenant Ekdal, *your* wild duck came up again.

EKDAL. He had such a remarkably clever dog, your father. And that dog—he dove down and brought her up.

GREGERS [*turning to HJALMAR*]. And then you got her here.

HJALMAR. Not directly. First she went home to your father's, but there she didn't do well, so Pettersen got his orders to put an end to her—

EKDAL [*half asleep*]. Hm—yes, Pettersen—that bonehead—

HJALMAR [*speaking more softly*]. That's the way we got her, you see. Father knows Pettersen a bit and when he heard all this about the wild duck, he arranged to have her handed over to us.

GREGERS. And now she's absolutely thriving in that attic room.

HJALMAR. Yes, it's incredible. She's gotten fat. I think she's been in there so long, too, that she's forgotten her old wild life, and that's what it all comes down to.

GREGERS. You're certainly right there, Hjalmar. Just don't let her ever catch sight of the sea and the sky— But I mustn't stay any longer, for I think your father's asleep.

HJALMAR. Oh, don't bother about that.

GREGERS. But incidentally—you said you had a room for rent, a free room?

HJALMAR. Yes. Why? Do you know someone, perhaps—?

GREGERS. Could I take that room?

HJALMAR. You?

GINA. No, not *you*, Mr. Werle—

GREGERS. Could I take the room? If so, I'll move in first thing in the morning.

HJALMAR. By all means, with the greatest pleasure—

GINA. No, but Mr. Werle, it's not at all the room for *you*.

HJALMAR. But Gina, how can you say that?

GINA. Oh, the room isn't large enough, or light enough, and—

GREGERS. That really doesn't matter, Mrs. Ekdal.

HJALMAR. I think it's a very pleasant room, and it's not badly furnished, either.

GINA. But remember those two who live right below.

GREGERS. What two are those?

GINA. Oh, one of them's been a private tutor—

HJALMAR. That's Molvik, from the university.

GINA. And then there's a doctor named Relling.

GREGERS. Relling? I know him somewhat. He practiced a while up in Hoidal.

GINA. They're a pretty wild pair, those fellows. They go out on the town evenings and then come home in the dead of night, and they're not always so—

GREGERS. One gets used to that soon enough. I'm hoping things will go for me the same as with the wild duck—

GINA. Well, I think you ought to sleep on it first, anyway.

GREGERS. You're not very anxious to have me in the house, Mrs. Ekdal.

GINA. Goodness, what makes you think that?

HJALMAR. Yes, Gina, this is really peculiar of you. [*To GREGERS.*] But tell me, do you expect to stay here in town till the first?

GREGERS [*putting on his overcoat*]. Yes, now I expect to stay on.

HJALMAR. But not at home with your father? What do you plan to do with yourself?

GREGERS. Yes, if I only knew that—then I'd be doing all right. But when one is cursed with being called Gregers—"Gregers"—and then "Werle" coming after—have you ever heard anything so disgusting?

HJALMAR. Oh, I don't agree at all.

GREGERS. Ugh! Phew! I feel I'd like to spit on any man with a name like that. But when one has to *live* with that curse of being called Gregers, as I do—

HJALMAR [*laughing*]. If you weren't Gregers Werle, who would you want to be?

GREGERS. If I could choose, above all else I'd like to be a clever dog.

GINA. A dog?

HEDVIG [*involuntarily*]. Oh no!

GREGERS. Yes. A really fantastic, clever dog, the kind that goes to the bottom after wild ducks when they dive under and bite fast into the weeds down in the mire.

HJALMAR. You know, Gregers—I can't follow a word you're saying.

GREGERS. Never mind. There's really nothing very remarkable in it. But tomorrow morning, early, I'll be moving in. [*To GINA.*] I won't be any trouble to you; I do everything for myself. [*To HJALMAR.*] The rest we can talk over tomorrow. Good night, Mrs. Ekdal. [*Nods to HEDVIG.*] Good night.

GINA. Good night, Mr. Werle.

HEDVIG. Good night.

HJALMAR [*who has lit a lamp*]. Just a minute. I'd better light your way; it's quite dark on the stairs.

[*GREGERS and HJALMAR go out through the hall.*]

GINA [*gazing into space, her sewing in her lap*]. Wasn't that a queer business, his wanting to be a dog?

HEDVIG. I'll tell you something, Mother—it seemed to me he meant something else by that.

GINA. What else could he mean?

HEDVIG. I don't know—but it was just as if he meant something else from what he said, all the time.

GINA. Do you think so? It was strange, all right.

HJALMAR [*coming back*]. The light was still lit. [*Putting out the lamp and setting it down.*] Ah, at last one can get a bite to eat. [*Beginning on the bread and butter.*] Well, now you see, Gina—if you simply keep wide awake, then—

GINA. What do you mean, wide awake?

HJALMAR. Well, it was lucky, then, that we got the room rented out for a while at last. And think—to a person like Gregers—a good old friend.

GINA. Yes. I don't know what to say. I don't.

HEDVIG. Oh, Mother, you'll see. It'll be fun.

HJALMAR. You really are peculiar. Before you were so eager to rent, and now you don't like it.

GINA. Yes, Hjalmar, if it could only have been somebody else. What do you think the old man will say?

HJALMAR. Old Werle? This doesn't concern him.

GINA. But you can sure bet that something has come up between them, since the son is moving out. You know how those two get along together.

HJALMAR. Yes, that may well be, but—

GINA. And now maybe the old man thinks it's you that's behind—

HJALMAR. He can think that as much as he likes! Old Werle has done a tremendous amount for me. God knows, I'm aware of that. But even so, I can't make myself eternally dependent on him.

GINA. But Hjalmar dear, that can have its effect on Grandfather. He may now lose that miserable little income he gets from Graaberg.

HJALMAR. I could almost say, so much the better! Isn't it rather humiliating for a man like me to see his gray-haired father go around like an outcast? But now time is gathering to a ripeness, I think. [*Takes another piece of bread and butter.*] Just as sure as I've got a mission in life, I'm going to carry it out!

HEDVIG. Oh yes, Daddy! Do!

GINA. Shh! Don't wake him up.

HJALMAR [*more quietly*]. I will carry it out, I tell you. There will come a day when— And that's why it's good we got the room rented out, for now I'm more independently fixed. Any man *must* be that, who's got a mission in life. [*Over by the armchair; emotionally.*] Poor old white-haired Father—lean on your Hjalmar. He has broad shoulders—powerful shoulders, in any case. One fine day you'll wake up and— [*To GINA.*] You do believe that, don't you?

GINA [*getting up*]. Yes, of course I do. But first let's see about getting him to bed.

HJALMAR. Yes, let's do that.

[*Gently they lift up the old man.*]

ACT III

HJALMAR EKDAL's studio. It is morning. Daylight streams through the large window in the sloping roof; the curtain is drawn back.

HJALMAR is sitting at the table, busy retouching a photograph; many other pictures lie in front of him. After a moment GINA, wearing a hat and coat, enters by the hall door; she has a covered basket on her arm.

HJALMAR. Back so soon, Gina?

GINA. Oh yes. Got to keep moving. [*She sets the basket on a chair and takes her coat off.*]

HJALMAR. Did you look in on Gregers?

GINA. Um-hm, I certainly did. Looks real nice in there. The moment he came, he got his room in beautiful shape.

HJALMAR. Oh?

GINA. Yes. He wanted to do everything himself, he said. So he starts building a fire in the stove, and the next thing he's closed down the damper so the whole room is full of smoke. Phew! What a stink, enough to—

HJALMAR. Oh no!

GINA. But that's not the best part! So then he wants to put it out, so he empties his whole water pitcher into the stove and now the floor's swimming in the worst muck.

HJALMAR. That's a nuisance.

GINA. I got the janitor's wife to come and scrub up after him, the pig; but it'll be unfit to live in till afternoon.

HJALMAR. What's he doing with himself in the meantime?

GINA. Thought he'd take a little walk, he said.

HJALMAR. I was in to see him for a moment too—after you left.

GINA. I heard that. You asked him for lunch.

HJALMAR. Just the tiniest little midday snack, you understand. It's the very first day—we could hardly avoid it. You always have something in the house.

GINA. I'll see what I can find.

HJALMAR. But now don't make it too skimpy. Because Relling and Molvik

are dropping in too, I think. I just met Relling on the stairs, you see, so of course I had to—

GINA. Oh? Must we have those two also?

HJALMAR. Good Lord, a couple of sandwiches more or less; what's the difference?

EKDAL [*opening his door and looking in*]. Say, listen, Hjalmar— [*Noticing GINA.*] Oh, well.

GINA. Is there something Grandfather wants?

EKDAL. Oh no. Let it be. Hmm. [*Goes in again.*]

GINA [*picking up the basket*]. Keep a sharp eye on him so he doesn't go out.

HJALMAR. Oh yes, I'll do that. Listen, Gina, a little herring salad would be awfully good—because Relling and Molvik were out on a binge last night.

GINA. Just so they don't come before I'm ready—

HJALMAR. Not a chance. Take your time.

GINA. That's fine, then—and meanwhile you can get a little work done.

HJALMAR. Can't you see how I'm working! I'm working for all I'm worth.

GINA. Because then you'll have *those* off your hands, you know. [*She carries the basket out to the kitchen. HJALMAR sits for a while, tinting the photograph in a glum and listless manner.*]

EKDAL [*peeks in, peers about the studio, and whispers*]. Are you busy, boy?

HJALMAR. Of course. I'm sitting here struggling with these pictures—

EKDAL. Oh well, don't bother. If you're so busy, then— Hm! [*He re-enters his room, leaving the door ajar.*]

HJALMAR [*continues for a moment in silence, then puts down the brush and goes over to the door*]. Father, are you busy?

EKDAL [*grumbling from within*]. When you're busy—I'm busy too. Huh!

HJALMAR. Yes, of course. [*Returns to his work.*]

EKDAL [*a moment later, coming in again*]. Hm. Well, now, Hjalmar, I'm really not *that* busy.

HJALMAR. I thought you had copying to do.

EKDAL. Oh, the devil! Can't he, Graaberg, wait a day or two? I'm sure it's no matter of life or death.

HJALMAR. No, and you're no slave, either.

EKDAL. And then there was that other business inside—

HJALMAR. Yes, that's just it. Maybe you want to go in? Shall I open it up for you?

EKDAL. Wouldn't be a bad idea, really.

HJALMAR [*getting up*]. And then we'd have *that* off our hands.

EKDAL. Yes, exactly. And it has to be ready first thing tomorrow. But it is tomorrow, isn't it?

HJALMAR. It certainly is tomorrow.

[*HJALMAR and EKDAL each push back one of the double doors. Within, morning sunlight shines through the skylights. A few doves fly back and forth; others perch, cooing, on the rafters. Chickens cackle now and then from back in the loft.*]

HJALMAR. There, now you can get in, Father.

EKDAL [*going in*]. Aren't you coming along?

HJALMAR. Well, you know what—I almost think— [*Sees GINA in the kitchen doorway.*] I? No, I haven't the time; I've got to work. But that means our new mechanism—

[*He pulls a cord; inside a curtain descends, its lower portion composed of a strip of old sailcloth, the upper part being a piece of worn-out fishnetting. By this means, the floor of the loft is rendered invisible.*]

HJALMAR [*returning to the table*]. That's that. Now at last I can work in peace for a while.

GINA. Is he in there, romping around again?

HJALMAR. Isn't that better than having him run down to Mrs. Eriksen's? [*Sitting.*] Is there anything you want? You look so—

GINA. I only wanted to ask, do you think we can set the lunch table in here?

HJALMAR. Well, we haven't any portraits scheduled that early, have we?

GINA. No. I don't expect anybody except that couple who want to be taken together.

HJALMAR. Why the devil can't they be taken together some other day?

GINA. Now, Hjalmar dear, I've got them booked for during your midday nap.

HJALMAR. Well, that's fine, then. So we'll eat in here.

GINA. All right. But there's no hurry about setting the table, you can certainly use it a while longer.

HJALMAR. Oh, it's obvious I'm using the table as much as I can!

GINA. Because then you'll be free later on, you know.

[*She goes back into the kitchen. A short pause.*]

EKDAL [*at the door to the loft, behind the net*]. Hjalmar!

HJALMAR. Well?

EKDAL. 'Fraid we'll have to move the water trough after all.

HJALMAR. Yes, that's what I've been saying all along.

EKDAL. Hm—hm—hm. [*Disappears from the doorway.*]

[*HJALMAR works a bit, glances toward the loft, and half rises. HEDVIG enters from the kitchen.*]

HJALMAR [*hurriedly sitting again*]. What do you want?

HEDVIG. I was just coming in to you, Father.

HJALMAR [*after a moment*]. You seem to be kind of snooping around. Are you checking up, maybe?

HEDVIG. No, not at all.

HJALMAR. What's Mother doing out there now?

HEDVIG. Oh, she's half through the herring salad. [*Going over to the table.*] Don't you have some little thing I could help you with, Daddy?

HJALMAR. Oh no. It's better just to leave me alone with all this—so long as my strength holds out. Nothing to worry about, Hedvig—if only your father can keep his health—

HEDVIG. Oh, Daddy, no. That's horrid; you mustn't talk like that. [*She wanders about a little, stops by the loft doorway, and looks in.*]

HJALMAR. What's he trying to do now?

HEDVIG. It must be a new pathway up to the water trough.

HJALMAR. He can't possibly rig that up on his own! And I'm condemned to sit here—!

HEDVIG [*going to him*]. Let me take the brush, Daddy. I know I can.

HJALMAR. Oh, nonsense, you'll only ruin your eyes.

HEDVIG. No such thing. Give me the brush.

HJALMAR [*getting up*]. Well, it'll only be for a minute or two.

HEDVIG. Pooh! How could that hurt me? [*Takes the brush.*] There now. [*Sitting.*] And here's one to go by.

HJALMAR. But don't ruin your eyes! Hear me? I won't take the blame; you can take the blame yourself—you hear me?

HEDVIG [*at work retouching*]. Yes, yes, sure I will.

HJALMAR. You're wonderfully clever, Hedvig. Just for a couple of minutes now.

[*He slips around the edge of the curtain into the loft. HEDVIG sits at her work. HJALMAR and EKDAL are heard arguing inside.*]

HJALMAR [*appearing behind the net*]. Hedvig, just hand me the pliers from the shelf. And the chisel, please. [*Turning, over his shoulder.*] Yes, now you'll see, Father. Will you give me a chance to show you the way I mean! [*HEDVIG fetches the desired tools from the bookcase and passes them in to him.*] Ah, thanks. See, dear, it was a good thing I came. [*He vanishes from the doorway; sounds of carpentry and bantering are heard. HEDVIG remains, looking in at them. A moment later, a knock at the hall door; she fails to notice it.*]

GREGERS [*bareheaded, and without his overcoat, enters, hesitating slightly at the door*]. Hm—

HEDVIG [*turning and going toward him*]. Good morning. Please come in.

GREGERS. Thanks. [*Looking at the loft.*] You seem to have workmen in the house.

HEDVIG. No, that's only Father and Grandfather. I'll go tell them.

GREGERS. No, no, don't bother. I'd rather wait a bit. [*He sits on the sofa.*]

HEDVIG. It's so messy here— [*Starts to remove the photographs.*]

GREGERS. Oh, they can stay. Are those some pictures that have to be finished?

HEDVIG. Yes, it's a little job I'm helping Daddy with.

GREGERS. Please don't let me disturb you.

HEDVIG. All right. [*She gathers her materials around her and sets to work again; GREGERS meanwhile regards her in silence.*]

GREGERS. Did the wild duck sleep well last night?

HEDVIG. Yes, I'm sure she did, thanks.

GREGERS [*turning toward the loft*]. It looks so very different by daylight than it did by moonlight.

HEDVIG. Yes, it can change so completely. In the morning it looks different from in the afternoon; and when it rains it's different from when it's clear.

GREGERS. Have you noticed that?

HEDVIG. Sure. You can't help it.

GREGERS. And do you like it in there with the wild duck, too?

HEDVIG. Yes, whenever I can be there—

GREGERS. But of course you don't have much free time; you do go to school, don't you?

HEDVIG. No, not any more. Daddy's afraid I'll hurt my eyes.

GREGERS. Oh. Then he reads to you himself.

HEDVIG. Daddy's promised to read to me, but he hasn't found time for that yet.

GREGERS. But isn't there anyone else to help you a little?

HEDVIG. Sure, there's Mr. Molvik, but he isn't always exactly, really—well—

GREGERS. He gets drunk, eh?

HEDVIG. He *certainly* does.

GREGERS. Well, then you do have time to yourself. And inside—I'll bet in there it's just like a world of its own—am I right?

HEDVIG. Oh, completely! And then there are so many wonderful things.

GREGERS. Really?

HEDVIG. Yes, big cupboards with books in them; and lots of the books have pictures.

GREGERS. Ah!

HEDVIG. And then there's an old cabinet with drawers and compartments, and a huge clock with figures that are supposed to come out. But the clock doesn't go any more.

GREGERS. Even time doesn't exist in there—with the wild duck.

HEDVIG. Yes. And then there's an old watercolor set and things like that. And then all the books.

GREGERS. And of course you read the books?

HEDVIG. Oh yes, whenever I can. But they're mostly in English, and I don't understand that. But then I look at the pictures. There's one just enormous book called *Harryson's History of London*; it must be a hundred years old, and it's got ever so many pictures in it. At the front there's a picture of Death with an hourglass and a girl. I think that's horrible. But then there are all the other pictures of churches and castles and streets and great ships sailing on the ocean.

GREGERS. But tell me, where did all these rare things come from!

HEDVIG. Oh, an old sea captain lived here once, and he brought them home. They called him "the flying Dutchman"—and that's the strangest thing, because he wasn't a Dutchman at all.

GREGERS. No?

HEDVIG. No. But then he didn't come back finally, and he left all these things behind.

GREGERS. Listen, tell me—when you sit in there and look at pictures, don't you ever want to go out and see the real world all for yourself?

HEDVIG. No, never! I'm going to stay at home always and help Daddy and Mother.

GREGERS. You mean finishing photographs?

HEDVIG. No, not just that. Most of all, I'd like to learn how to engrave pictures like those in the English books.

GREGERS. Hm. What does your father say to that?

HEDVIG. I don't think he likes it. Daddy's so funny about such things. Just think, he talks about me learning basket-making and wickerwork! But I don't see anything in *that*.

GREGERS. Oh no, I don't either.

HEDVIG. But Daddy's right when he says that if I'd learned how to make baskets, I could have made the new basket for the wild duck.

GREGERS. You could have, yes—and that really was up to you.

HEDVIG. Yes, because it's *my* wild duck.

GREGERS. Yes, of course it is.

HEDVIG. Uh-huh, I own it. But Daddy and Grandpa can borrow it as much as they want.

GREGERS. Oh? What do they do with it?

HEDVIG. Oh, they look after it and build things for it and so on.

GREGERS. I can well imagine. The wild duck rules supreme in there, doesn't she?

HEDVIG. Yes, she does, and that's because she's a real wild bird. And then it's so sad for her; the poor thing has no one to turn to.

GREGERS. No family, like the rabbits—

HEDVIG. No. Even the chickens have all the others that they were baby chicks with, but she's so completely apart from any of her own. So you see, everything is so really mysterious about the wild duck. There's no one who knows her, and no one who knows where she's come from, either.

GREGERS. And actually, she's been in the depths of the sea.

HEDVIG [*glances at him, suppresses a smile, and asks*]. Why did you say "depths of the sea"?

GREGERS. What else should I say?

HEDVIG. You could have said "bottom of the sea"—or "the ocean's bottom"?

GREGERS. But couldn't I just as well say "depths of the sea"?

HEDVIG. Sure. But to me it sounds so strange when someone else says "depths of the sea."

GREGERS. But why? Tell me why?

HEDVIG. No, I won't. It's something so stupid.

GREGERS. It couldn't be. Now tell me why you smiled.

HEDVIG. That was because always, when all of a sudden—in a flash—I happen to think of that in there, it always seems to me that the whole room and everything in it is called "the depths of the sea"! But that's all so stupid.

GREGERS. Don't you dare say that.

HEDVIG. Oh yes, because it's only an attic.

GREGERS. Are you so sure of that?

HEDVIG [*astonished*]. That it's an attic!

GREGERS. Yes. Do you know that for certain?

[HEDVIG, *speechless, stares at him open-mouthed. GINA enters from the kitchen with a tablecloth.*]

GREGERS [*getting up*]. I'm afraid I've come too early for you.

GINA. Oh, you can find yourself a spot; it's almost ready now. Clear the table, Hedvig.

[HEDVIG *puts away the materials; during the following dialogue, she and GINA set the table. GREGERS settles in the armchair and pages through an album.*]

GREGERS. I hear you can retouch photographs, Mrs. Ekdal.

GINA [*with a side-glance*]. Um-hm, so I can.

GREGERS. That's really very lucky.

GINA. Why "lucky"?

GREGERS. With Hjalmar a photographer, I mean.

HEDVIG. Mother can take pictures, too.

GINA. Oh yes, I even got lessons in that.

GREGERS. So we might say it's you who runs the business.

GINA. Yes, when my husband hasn't the time himself—

GREGERS. He finds himself so taken up with his old father, I suppose.

GINA. Yes, and then a man like Hjalmar shouldn't have to go snapping pictures of every Tom, Dick and Harry.

GREGERS. I agree; but once he's chosen this line of work, then—

GINA. Mr. Werle, you must realize that my husband is not just any old photographer.

GREGERS. Well, naturally; but even so—

[*A shot is fired in the loft.*]

GREGERS [*jumping up*]. What's that!

HEDVIG. They go hunting.

GREGERS. What! [*Going to the loft doorway.*] Have you gone hunting, Hjalmar?

HJALMAR [*behind the net*]. Are you here? I didn't realize; I was so occupied—[*To HEDVIG.*] And you, you didn't tell us. [*Comes into the studio.*]

GREGERS. Do you go shooting in the loft?

HJALMAR [*producing a double-barreled pistol*]. Oh, only with this here.

GINA. Yes, some day you and Grandfather'll have an accident with that there gun.

HJALMAR [*annoyed*]. I believe I've remarked that this type of firearm is called a pistol.

GINA. I don't see that that makes it any better.

GREGERS. So you've turned out a "hunter" as well, Hjalmar?

HJALMAR. Just a little rabbit hunt, now and then. It's mainly for Father's sake, you understand.

GINA. Men are so funny, really; they've always got to have their little diversities.

HJALMAR [*angrily*]. That's right, yes—they always have to have their little diversions.

GINA. Yes, that's just what I was saying.

HJALMAR. Oh, well! [*To GREGERS.*] So that's it, and then we're very lucky in the way the loft is placed—nobody can hear us when we're shooting. [*Puts the pistol on the highest bookshelf.*] Don't touch the pistol, Hedvig! One barrel's still loaded, don't forget.

GREGERS [*peering through the netting*]. You've got a hunting rifle too, I see.

HJALMAR. Yes, that's Father's old rifle. It won't shoot any more; something's gone wrong with the lock. But it's a lot of fun to have anyway, because we can take it all apart and clean it and grease it and put it together again—Of course, it's mostly Father who fools around with that sort of thing.

HEDVIG [*crossing to GREGERS*]. Now you can really see the wild duck.

GREGERS. I was just now looking at her. She seems to drag one wing a little.

HJALMAR. Well, no wonder; she took a bad wound.

GREGERS. And then she limps a little. Isn't that so?

HJALMAR. Maybe just a tiny bit.

HEDVIG. Yes, that was the foot the dog bit her in.

HJALMAR. But she hasn't a thing wrong with her otherwise; and that's simply remarkable when you think that she's had a charge of shot in her and been held by the teeth of a dog—

GREGERS [*with a glance at HEDVIG*]. And been in the depths of the sea—so long.

HEDVIG [*smiling*]. Yes.

GINA [*arranging the table*]. Oh, that sacred duck—there's fuss enough made over her.

HJALMAR. Hm. Are you nearly ready?

GINA. Yes, right away. Hedvig, now you can come and help me.

[GINA and HEDVIG exit into the kitchen.]

HJALMAR [*in an undertone*]. I don't think it's so good that you stand there, watching my father. He doesn't like it. [GREGERS comes away from the loft doorway.] And it's better, too, that I close up before the others come. [*Shooing away the menagerie with his hands.*] Hssh! Hssh! Go 'way now! [*With this he raises the curtain and draws the double doors together.*] I invented these contraptions myself. It's really great fun to have such things around to take care of and fix when they get out of whack. And besides, it's absolutely necessary, you know; Gina doesn't go for rabbits and chickens out here in the studio.

GREGERS. Of course not. And I suppose it is your wife who manages here?

HJALMAR. My general rule is to delegate the routine matters to her, and that leaves me free to retire to the living room to think over more important things.

GREGERS. And what sort of things are these, Hjalmar?

HJALMAR. I've been wondering why you haven't asked me that before. Or maybe you haven't heard about my invention.

GREGERS. Invention? No.

HJALMAR. Oh? Then you haven't? Well, no, up there in that waste and wilderness—

GREGERS. Then you've really invented something!

HJALMAR. Not completely invented it yet, but I'm getting very close. You must realize that when I decided to dedicate my life to photography, it wasn't my idea to spend time taking pictures of a lot of nobodies.

GREGERS. Yes, that's what your wife was just now saying.

HJALMAR. I swore that if I devoted my powers to the craft, I would then exalt it to such heights that it would become both an art and a science. That's when I decided on this amazing invention.

GREGERS. And what does this invention consist of? What's its purpose?

HJALMAR. Yes, Gregers, you mustn't ask for details like that yet. It takes time, you know. And you mustn't think it's vanity that's driving me, either. I'm certainly not working for myself. Oh no, it's my life's work that stands before me day and night.

GREGERS. What life's work is that?

HJALMAR. Remember the silver-haired old man?

GREGERS. Your poor father. Yes, but actually what can you do for him?

HJALMAR. I can raise his self-respect from the dead—by restoring the Ekdal name to dignity and honor.

GREGERS. So that's your life's work.

HJALMAR. Yes. I am going to rescue that shipwrecked man. That's just what he suffered—shipwreck—when the storm broke over him. When all those harrowing investigations took place, he wasn't himself anymore. That pistol, there—the one we use to shoot rabbits with—it's played a part in the tragedy of the Ekdals.

GREGERS. Pistol! Oh?

HJALMAR. When he was sentenced and facing prison, he had that pistol in his hand—

GREGERS. You mean he—!

HJALMAR. Yes. But he didn't dare. He was a coward. That shows how broken and degraded he'd become by then. Can you picture it? He, a soldier, a man who'd shot nine bears and was directly descended from two lieutenant colonels—I mean, one after the other, of course. Can you picture it, Gregers?

GREGERS. Yes, I can picture it very well.

HJALMAR. Well, I can't. And then that pistol intruded on our family history once again. When he was under lock and key, dressed like a common prisoner—oh, those were agonizing times for me, you can imagine. I kept the shades of both my windows drawn. When I looked out, I saw the sun shining the same as ever. I couldn't understand it. I saw the people going along the street, laughing and talking of trivial things. I couldn't understand it. I felt all creation should be standing still, like during an eclipse.

GREGERS. I felt that way when my mother died.

HJALMAR. During one of those times Hjalmar Ekdal put a pistol to his own breast.

GREGERS. You were thinking of—

HJALMAR. Yes.

GREGERS. But you didn't shoot?

HJALMAR. No. In that critical moment I won a victory over myself. I stayed alive. But you can bet it takes courage to choose life in those circumstances.

GREGERS. Well, that depends on your point of view.

HJALMAR. Oh, absolutely. But it was all for the best, because now I've nearly finished my invention; and then Dr. Relling thinks, just as I do, that they'll let Father wear his uniform again. That's the only reward I'm after.

GREGERS. So it's really the uniform that he—?

HJALMAR. Yes, that's what he really hungers and craves for. You've no idea how that makes my heart ache. Every time we throw a little family party—like my birthday, or Gina's, or whatever—then the old man comes in, wearing that uniform from his happier days. But if there's even a knock at the door, he goes scuttering back in his room fast as the old legs will carry him. You see, he doesn't dare show himself to strangers. What a heartrending spectacle for a son!

GREGERS. Approximately when do you think the invention will be finished?

HJALMAR. Oh, good Lord, don't hold me to a timetable. An invention, that's something you can hardly dictate to. It depends a great deal on inspiration, on a sudden insight—and it's nearly impossible to say in advance when that will occur.

GREGERS. But it is making progress?

HJALMAR. Of course it's making progress. Every single day I think about my invention. I'm brimming with it. Every afternoon, right after lunch, I lock myself in the living room where I can meditate in peace. But it's no use driving me; it simply won't work. Relling says so too.

GREGERS. And you don't think all those contraptions in the loft distract you and scatter your talents?

HJALMAR. No, no, no, on the contrary. You mustn't say that. I can't always go around here, brooding over the same nerve-racking problems. I need some diversion to fill in the time. You see, inspiration, the moment of insight—when that comes, nothing can stop it.

GREGERS. My dear Hjalmar, I suspect you've got a bit of the wild duck in you.

HJALMAR. Of the wild duck? What do you mean?

GREGERS. You've plunged to the bottom and clamped hold of the seaweed.

HJALMAR. I suppose you mean that near-fatal shot that brought down Father—and me as well?

GREGERS. Not quite that. I wouldn't say you're wounded; but you're wandering in a poisonous swamp, Hjalmar. You've got an insidious disease in your system, and so you've gone to the bottom to die in the dark.

HJALMAR. Me? Die in the dark! You know what, Gregers—you'll really have to stop that talk.

GREGERS. But never mind. I'm going to raise you up again. You know, I've found my purpose in life, too. I found it yesterday.

HJALMAR. Yes, that may well be; but you can just leave me out of it. I can assure you that—apart from my quite understandable melancholy—I'm as well off as any man could wish to be.

GREGERS. And your thinking so is part of the sickness.

HJALMAR. Gregers, you're my old friend—please—don't talk any more about sickness and poison. I'm not used to that kind of conversation. In my house nobody talks to me about ugly things.

GREGERS. That's not hard to believe.

HJALMAR. Yes, because it isn't good for me. And there's no swamp air here, as you put it. In a poor photographer's house, life is cramped; I know that. My lot is a poor one—but, you know, I'm an inventor. And I'm the family breadwinner, too. *That's what sustains me through all the pettiness. Ah, here they come with the lunch.*

[GINA and HEDVIG bring in bottles of beer, a decanter of brandy, glasses, and the like. At the same time, RELING and MOLVIK enter from the hall. Neither wears a hat or overcoat; MOLVIK is dressed in black.]

GINA [setting things down on the table]. Well, the two of them—right on time.

RELING. Molvik was positive he could smell that herring salad, and there was just no holding him back. 'Morning for the second time, Ekdal.

HJALMAR. Gregers, I'd like you to meet Mr. Molvik. And Dr.—ah, but don't you know Relling?

GREGERS. Yes, slightly.

RELING. Well, Mr. Werle junior. Yes, we've had a few run-ins together up at the Hoidal works. You've just moved in, haven't you?

GREGERS. I moved in this morning.

RELLING. And Molvik and I live downstairs; so you're not very far from a doctor and a priest, if you ever have need of such.

GREGERS. Thanks; that could happen. After all, we had thirteen at the table last night.

HJALMAR. Oh, don't start in on ugly subjects again!

RELLING. You don't have to worry, Hjalmar; Lord knows this doesn't involve you.

HJALMAR. I hope not, for my family's sake. But let's sit down and eat and drink and be merry.

GREGERS. Shouldn't we wait for your father?

HJALMAR. No, he'll have his lunch sent in to him later. Come now!

[*The men sit at the table, eating and drinking. GINA and HEDVIG go in and out, serving the food.*]

RELLING. Last night Molvik was tight as a tick, Mrs. Ekdal.

GINA. Oh? Last night again?

RELLING. Didn't you hear him when I finally brought him home?

GINA. No, can't say I did.

RELLING. That's lucky—because Molvik was revolting last night.

GINA. Is that so, Molvik?

MOLVIK. Let's draw a veil over last night's activities. They have no bearing on my better self.

RELLING [*to GREGERS*]. All of a sudden he's possessed by an impulse; and then I have to take him out on a bat. You see, Mr. Molvik is demonic.

GREGERS. Demonic?

RELLING. Molvik is demonic, yes.

GREGERS. Hm.

RELLING. And demonic natures aren't made to go through life on the straight and narrow; they've got to take detours every so often. Well—and you're still sticking it out there at that dark, hideous mill.

GREGERS. I've stuck it out till now.

RELLING. And did you ever collect on that "summons" you were going around with?

GREGERS. Summons? [*Understanding him.*] Oh, that.

HJALMAR. Were you serving summonses, Gregers?

GREGERS. Nonsense.

RELLING. Oh, but he was, definitely. He was going around to all the farms and cabins with copies of something he called "Summons to the Ideal."

GREGERS. I was young then.

RELLING. You're right, there. You were very young. And that summons to the ideal—it wasn't ever honored during my time up there.

GREGERS. Nor later, either.

RELLING. Well, I guess you've learned enough to cut down your expectations a bit.

GREGERS. Never—when I meet a man who's a real man.

HJALMAR. Yes, that seems quite reasonable to me. A little butter, Gina.

RELLING. And then a piece of pork for Molvik.

MOLVIK. Ugh, no pork!

[*There is a knock at the loft door.*]

HJALMAR. Open it, Hedvig; Father wants to get out.

[HEDVIG goes to open the door a little; old EKDAL enters with a fresh rabbit skin. He closes the door after him.]

EKDAL. Good morning, gentlemen. Good hunting today. Shot a big one.

HJALMAR. And you went ahead and skinned it without waiting for me!

EKDAL. Salted it, too. It's nice tender meat, this rabbit meat. And it's so sweet. Tastes like sugar. Enjoy your food, gentlemen! [He goes into his room.]

MOLVIK [getting up]. Pardon—I, I can't—got to go downstairs right—

RELLING. Drink soda water, man!

MOLVIK [rushing out the hall door]. Ugh—ugh!

RELLING [to HJALMAR]. Let's empty a glass to the old hunter.

HJALMAR [clinking glasses with him]. Yes, to the gallant sportsman on the brink of the grave.

RELLING. To the old, gray-haired— [Drinks.] Tell me something, is it gray hair he's got, or is it white?

HJALMAR. It's really a little of both. But as a matter of fact, he's scarcely got a hair on his head.

RELLING. Well, fake hair will take you through life, good as any. You know, Ekdal, you're really a very lucky man. You have your high mission in life to fight for—

HJALMAR. And I am fighting for it, too.

RELLING. And then you've got this clever wife of yours, padding around in her slippers and wagglng her hips and keeping you neat and cozy.

HJALMAR. Yes, Gina—[nodding at her] you're a good companion for life's journey, you are.

GINA. Oh, don't sit there deprecating me.

RELLING. And what about your Hedvig, Ekdal?

HJALMAR [stirred]. My child, yes! My child above all. Hedvig, come here to me. [Caresses her head.] What day is tomorrow, dear?

HEDVIG [shaking him]. Oh, don't talk about it, Daddy!

HJALMAR. It's like a knife turning in my heart when I think how bare it's all going to be, just the tiniest celebration out in the loft—

HEDVIG. Oh, but that will be just wonderful!

RELLING. And wait till that marvelous invention comes to the world, Hedvig!

HJALMAR. Ah, yes—then you'll see! Hedvig, I've resolved to make your future secure. As long as you live, you'll live in style. I'll assure you of something, one way or another. That will be the poor inventor's sole reward.

HEDVIG [whispering with her arms around his neck]. Oh, you dear, dear Daddy!

RELLING [to GREGERS]. Well, now, isn't it good for a change to be sitting around a well-spread table in a happy family circle?

HJALMAR. Yes, I really prize these hours around the table.

GREGERS. I, for my part, don't thrive in marsh gas.

RELLING. Marsh gas?

HJALMAR. Oh, don't start that rubbish again!

GINA. Lord knows there isn't any marsh gas here, Mr. Werle; every blessed day I air the place out.

GREGERS [leaving the table]. You can't air out the stench I mean.

HJALMAR. Stench!

GINA. What about that, Hjalmar!

RELLING. Beg pardon—but it wouldn't be you who brought that stench in with you from the mines up there?

GREGERS. It's just like you to call what I'm bringing into this house a stench.

RELLING [*crossing over to him*]. Listen, Mr. Werle junior, I've got a strong suspicion that you're still going around with the uncut version of that "Summons to the Ideal" in your back pocket.

GREGERS. I've got it written in my heart.

RELLING. I don't care where the devil you've got it; I wouldn't advise you to play process-server here as long as I'm around.

GREGERS. And what if I do anyway?

RELLING. Then you'll go head first down the stairs, that's what.

HJALMAR [*getting up*]. Come, now, Relling!

GREGERS. Yes, just throw me out—

GINA [*coming between them*]. You can't do that, Relling. But I'll tell you this, Mr. Werle—that you, who made all that mess with your stove, have no right to come to me talking about smells.

[*A knock at the hall door.*]

HEDVIG. Mother, somebody's knocking.

GINA. I'll go—[*She crosses and opens the door, gives a start, shudders and shrinks back.*] Uff! Oh no!

[*Old WERLE, in a fur coat, steps into the room.*]

WERLE. Excuse me, but I think my son is living in this house.

GINA [*catching her breath*]. Yes.

HJALMAR [*coming closer*]. If Mr. Werle will be so good as to—

WERLE. Thanks, I'd just like to talk with my son.

GREGERS. Yes, why not? Here I am.

WERLE. I'd like to talk with you in your room.

GREGERS. In my room—fine—[*Starts in.*]

GINA. No. Good Lord, that's in no condition for—

WERLE. Well, out in the hall, then. This is just between us.

HJALMAR. You can talk here, Mr. Werle. Come into the living room, Relling.

[*HJALMAR and RELLING go out to the right; GINA takes HEDVIG with her into the kitchen.*]

GREGERS [*after a brief interval*]. Well, now it's just the two of us.

WERLE. You dropped a few remarks last night—And since you've now taken a room with the Ekdals, I must assume that you're planning something or other against me.

GREGERS. I'm planning to open Hjalmar Ekdal's eyes. He's going to see his situation just as it is—that's all.

WERLE. Is *that* the mission in life you talked about yesterday?

GREGERS. Yes. You haven't left me any other.

WERLE. Am I the one that spoiled your mind, Gregers?

GREGERS. You've spoiled my entire life. I'm not thinking of all that with Mother. But you're the one I can thank for my going around, whipped and driven by this guilt-ridden conscience.

WERLE. Ah, it's your conscience that's gone bad.

GREGERS. I should have taken a stand against you when the trap was laid

for Lieutenant Ekdal. I should have warned him, for I had a pretty good idea what was coming off.

WERLE. Yes, you really should have spoken up then.

GREGERS. I didn't dare; I was so cowed and frightened. I was unspeakably afraid of you—both then and for a long time after.

WERLE. That fright seems to be over now.

GREGERS. It is, luckily. The harm done to old Ekdal, both by me and—others, can never be undone; but Hjalmar I can free from all the lies and evasions that are smothering him here.

WERLE. You believe you'd be doing him good by that?

GREGERS. That's what I believe.

WERLE. Maybe you think Ekdal's the kind of man who'll thank you for that friendly service?

GREGERS. Yes! He is that kind of man.

WERLE. Hmm—we'll see.

GREGERS. And besides—if I'm ever to go on living, I'll have to find a cure for my sick conscience.

WERLE. It'll never be sound. Your conscience has been sickly from childhood. It's an inheritance from your mother, Gregers—the only inheritance she left you.

GREGERS [*with a wry half-smile*]. You've never been able to accept the fact, have you, that you calculated wrong when you thought she'd bring you a fortune?

WERLE. Let's not get lost in irrelevancies. Then you're still intent on this goal of putting Ekdal on what you suppose is the right track?

GREGERS. Yes, I'm intent on that.

WERLE. Well, then I could have saved myself the walk up here. For there's no point in asking if you'll move back home with me?

GREGERS. No.

WERLE. And you won't come into the business either?

GREGERS. No.

WERLE. Very well. But since I'm now planning a second marriage, the estate, of course, will be divided between us.

GREGERS [*quickly*]. No, I don't want that.

WERLE. You don't want it?

GREGERS. No, I wouldn't dare, for the sake of my conscience.

WERLE [*after a pause*]. You going back to the works again?

GREGERS. No. I consider that I've retired from your service.

WERLE. But what are you going to do, then?

GREGERS. Simply carry out my life's mission; nothing else.

WERLE. Yes, but afterwards? What will you live on?

GREGERS. I have some of my salary put aside.

WERLE. Yes, that won't last long!

GREGERS. I think it will last my time.

WERLE. What do you mean by that?

GREGERS. I'm not answering any more.

WERLE. Good-bye then, Gregers.

GREGERS. Good-bye.

[*Old WERLE goes out.*]

HJALMAR [*peering out*]. Has he gone?

GREGERS. Yes.

[HJALMAR and RELLING come in. GINA and HEDVIG also return from the kitchen.]

RELLING. There's one lunch gone to the dogs.

GREGERS. Put your things on, Hjalmar; you've got to take a long walk with me.

HJALMAR. Yes, gladly. What did your father want? Was it anything to do with me?

GREGERS. Just come. We have some things to talk over. I'll go and get my coat. [*He leaves by the hall door.*]

GINA. You mustn't go out with him, Hjalmar.

RELLING. No, don't go. Stay where you are.

HJALMAR [*getting his hat and overcoat*]. But why? When a childhood friend feels a need to open his mind to me in private—

RELLING. But damn it all! Can't you see the man's mad, crazy, out of his skull!

GINA. Yes, that's the truth, if you'd listen. His mother, off and on, had those same conniption fits.

HJALMAR. That's just why he needs a friend's watchful eye on him. [*To GINA.*] Be sure dinner's ready in plenty of time. See you later. [*Goes out the hall door.*]

RELLING. It's really a shame that fellow didn't go straight to hell down one of the Hoidal mines.

GINA. Mercy—why do you say that?

RELLING [*muttering*]. Oh, I've got my reasons.

GINA. Do you think Gregers Werle is really crazy?

RELLING. No, worse luck. He's no crazier than most people. But he's got a disease in his system all the same.

GINA. What is it that's wrong with him?

RELLING. All right, I'll tell you, Mrs. Ekdal. He's suffering from an acute case of moralistic fever.

GINA. Moralistic fever?

HEDVIG. Is that a kind of disease?

RELLING. Oh yes, it's a national disease, but it only breaks out now and then. [*Nodding to GINA.*] Thanks for lunch. [*He goes out through the hall door.*]

GINA [*walking restlessly around the room*]. Ugh, that Gregers Werle—he was always a cold fish.

HEDVIG [*standing by the table, looking searchingly at her*]. This is all so strange to me.

ACT IV

HJALMAR EKDAL'S studio. A photograph has just been taken; a portrait camera covered with a cloth, a stand, a couple of chairs, a console table, among other things, stand well out in the room. Late afternoon light; it is near sunset; somewhat later it begins to grow dark.

GINA is standing in the hall doorway with a plate-holder and a wet photographic plate in her hand, talking with someone outside.

GINA. Yes, that's definite. When I promise something, I keep my word. On Monday the first dozen will be ready. Good-bye. Good-bye. [*Footsteps are heard descending the stairs. GINA closes the door, puts the plate into the holder, and slips both back into the covered camera.*]

HEDVIG [*coming in from the kitchen*]. Are they gone?

GINA [*tidying up*]. Yes, thank goodness, at last I'm rid of them.

HEDVIG. But why do you suppose Daddy isn't home yet?

GINA. Are you sure he's not below with Relling?

HEDVIG. No, he's not there. I ran down the back stairs just now and asked.

GINA. And his dinner's standing and getting cold, too.

HEDVIG. Just imagine—Daddy's always sure to be on time for dinner.

GINA. Oh, he'll be right along, you'll see.

HEDVIG. Oh, I wish he would come! Everything's so funny around here.

GINA [*calling out*]. There he is!

[HJALMAR comes in by the hall door.]

HEDVIG [*running toward him*]. Daddy! Oh, we've waited ages for you!

GINA [*eyeing him*]. You've been out pretty long, Hjalmar.

HJALMAR [*without looking at her*]. I've been a while, yes. [*He takes off his overcoat. GINA and HEDVIG start to help him; he waves them away.*]

GINA. Did you eat with Werle, maybe?

HJALMAR [*hanging his coat up*]. No.

GINA [*going toward the kitchen*]. I'll bring your dinner in, then.

HJALMAR. No, the dinner can wait. I don't want to eat now.

HEDVIG [*coming closer*]. Don't you feel well, Daddy?

HJALMAR. Well? Oh yes, well enough. We had an exhausting walk, Gregers and I.

GINA. You shouldn't do that, Hjalmar; you're not used to it.

HJALMAR. Hm. There are a lot of things a man's got to get used to in this world. [*Walking about the room a bit.*] Did anyone come while I was out?

GINA. No one but that engaged couple.

HJALMAR. No new orders?

GINA. No, not today.

HEDVIG. You'll see, there'll be some tomorrow, Daddy.

HJALMAR. I certainly hope so, because tomorrow I'm going to throw myself into my work—completely.

HEDVIG. Tomorrow! But don't you remember what day tomorrow is?

HJALMAR. Oh yes, that's right. Well, the day after tomorrow, then. From now on, I'm doing everything myself; I just want to be left alone with all the work.

GINA. But Hjalmar, what's the point of that? It'll only make your life miserable. Let me handle the photographing, and then you'll be free to work on the invention.

HEDVIG. And free for the wild duck, Daddy—and for all the chickens and rabbits—

HJALMAR. Don't talk to me about that rubbish! Starting tomorrow I shall never again set foot in that loft.

HEDVIG. Yes, but Daddy, you promised me tomorrow there'd be a celebration.

HJALMAR. Hm, that's true. Well, the day after, then. That infernal wild duck—I'd almost like to wring its neck!

HEDVIG [*crying out*]. The wild duck!

GINA. What an idea!

HEDVIG [*shaking him*]. Yes, but Daddy—it's my wild duck!

HJALMAR. That's why I won't do it. I haven't the heart—for your sake, Hedvig, I haven't the heart. But deep inside me I feel I ought to. I shouldn't tolerate under my roof a creature that's been in that man's hands.

GINA. My goodness, just because Grandfather got her from that worthless Pettersen—

HJALMAR [*pacing the floor*]. There are certain standards—what should I call them—ideal standards, let's say—certain claims on us that a man can't put aside without damaging his soul.

HEDVIG [*following him*]. But think—the wild duck—the poor wild duck!

HJALMAR [*stopping*]. You heard me say I'd spare it—for your sake. It won't be hurt, not a hair on its—well, anyway, I'll spare it. There are more important matters to settle. But Hedvig, now you better get out for your afternoon walk; it's already pretty dark for you.

HEDVIG. No, I don't want to go out now.

HJALMAR. Yes, go on. You seem to be blinking your eyes so. All these fumes in here aren't good for you; the air here under this roof is bad.

HEDVIG. All right, then, I'll run down the back stairs and take a little walk. My coat and hat? Oh, they're in my room. Daddy—promise you won't hurt the wild duck while I'm out.

HJALMAR. There won't be a feather ruffled on its head. [*Drawing her to him.*] You and I, Hedvig—we two! Now run along, dear.

[HEDVIG *nods to her parents and goes out through the kitchen.*]

HJALMAR [*walking around without looking up*]. Gina.

GINA. Yes?

HJALMAR. From tomorrow on—or let's say the day after tomorrow—I'd prefer to keep the household accounts myself.

GINA. You want to keep the household accounts, too?

HJALMAR. Yes, or budget the income, in any case.

GINA. Lord love us, there's nothing to that.

HJALMAR. One wouldn't think so. It seems to me you can make our money stretch remarkably far. [*Stopping and looking at her.*] How is that?

GINA. Hedvig and I, we don't need much.

HJALMAR. Is it true that Father gets such good pay for the copying he does for Werle?

GINA. I don't know how good it is. I don't know rates for such things.

HJALMAR. Well, what does he get, just roughly? Tell me!

GINA. It's never the same. I suppose it's roughly what he costs us, with a little pocket money thrown in.

HJALMAR. What he costs us! That's something you've never told me before!

GINA. No, I never could. You were always so happy thinking he got everything from you.

HJALMAR. And instead it comes from Mr. Werle.

GINA. Oh, but he's got plenty to spare, that one.

HJALMAR. Let's have the lamp lit!

GINA [*lighting it*]. And then we can't know if it really is the old man; it could well be Graaberg—

HJALMAR. Why try to put me off with Graaberg?

GINA. No, I don't know. I just thought—

HJALMAR. Hm!

GINA. You know it wasn't me that got Grandfather the copying. It was Berta, that time she came here.

HJALMAR. Your voice sounds so shaky.

GINA [*putting the shade on the lamp*]. It does?

HJALMAR. And then your hands are trembling. Or aren't they?

GINA [*firmly*]. Say it straight out, Hjalmar. What is it he's gone and said about me?

HJALMAR. Is it true—can it possibly be that—that there was some kind of involvement between you and Mr. Werle while you were in service there?

GINA. That's not true. Not then, there wasn't. Werle was after me, all right. And his wife thought there was something to it, and she made a big fuss and bother, and she roasted me coming and going, she did—so I quit.

HJALMAR. But then what!

GINA. Yes, so then I went home. And Mother—well, she wasn't all you took her to be, Hjalmar; she ran on telling me one thing and another, because Werle was a widower by then.

HJALMAR. Yes. And then!

GINA. Well, you might as well know it all. He didn't give up till he had his way.

HJALMAR [*with a clap of his hands*]. And this is the mother of my child! How could you keep that hidden from me!

GINA. Yes, I did the wrong thing; I really should have told you long ago.

HJALMAR. Right at the start, you mean—so I could have known what sort you are.

GINA. But would you have married me anyway?

HJALMAR. How can you think that?

GINA. No. But that's why I didn't dare say anything then. Because I'd come to be so terribly in love with you, as you know. And then how could I make myself utterly miserable—

HJALMAR [*walking about*]. And this is my Hedvig's mother! And then to know that everything I see around me—[*kicking at a table*] my whole home—I owe to a favored predecessor. Ah, that charmer Werle!

GINA. Do you regret the fourteen, fifteen years we've lived together?

HJALMAR [*stopping in front of her*]. Tell me—don't you every day, every hour, regret this spider web of deception you've spun around me? Answer me that! Don't you really go around in a torment of remorse?

GINA. Hjalmar dear, I've got so much to think about just with the housework and the day's routine—

HJALMAR. Then you never turn a critical eye on your past!

GINA. No. Good Lord, I'd almost forgotten that old affair.

HJALMAR. Oh, this dull, unfeeling content! To me there's something outrageous about it. Just think—not one regret!

GINA. But Hjalmar, tell me now—what would have happened to you if you hadn't found a wife like me?

HJALMAR. Like you—!

GINA. Yes, because I've always been a bit more hard-headed and resourceful than you. Well, of course I'm a couple of years older.

HJALMAR. What would have happened to me?

GINA. You were pretty bad off at the time you met me; you can't deny that.

HJALMAR. "Pretty bad off" you call it. Oh, you have no idea what a man goes through when he's deep in misery and despair—especially a man of my fiery temperament.

GINA. No, that may be. And I shouldn't say nothing about it, either, because you turned out such a good-hearted husband as soon as you got a house and home—and now we've made it so snug and cozy here, and pretty soon both Hedvig and I could begin spending a little on food and clothes.

HJALMAR. In the swamp of deception, yes.

GINA. Ugh, that disgusting creature, tracking his way through our house!

HJALMAR. I also thought this home was a good place to be. That was a pipe dream. Now where can I find the buoyancy I need to carry my invention into reality? Maybe it'll die with me; and then it'll be your past, Gina, that killed it.

GINA [*close to tears*]. No, you mustn't ever say such things, Hjalmar. All my days I've only wanted to do what's best for you!

HJALMAR. I wonder—what happens now to the breadwinner's dream? When I lay in there on the sofa pondering my invention, I had a hunch it would drain my last bit of strength. I sensed that the day I took the patent in my hand—that would be the day of—departure. And it was my dream that then you would go on as the departed inventor's prosperous widow.

GINA [*drying her eyes*]. No, don't say that, Hjalmar. Lord knows I never want to see the day I'm a widow.

HJALMAR. Oh, what does it matter? Everything's over and done with now. Everything!

[GREGERS cautiously opens the hall door and looks in.]

GREGERS. May I come in?

HJALMAR. Yes, do.

GREGERS [*advancing with a beaming countenance, hands outstretched as if to take theirs*]. Now, you dear people—! [*Looks from one to the other, then whispers to HJALMAR.*] But isn't it done, then?

HJALMAR [*resoundingly*]. It's done.

GREGERS. It is?

HJALMAR. I've just known the bitterest hour of my life.

GREGERS. But also the most exalted, I think.

HJALMAR. Well, anyway, it's off our hands for the moment.

GINA. God forgive you, Mr. Werle.

GREGERS [*with great surprise*]. But I don't understand this.

HJALMAR. What don't you understand?

GREGERS. With this great rapport—the kind that forges a whole new way of life—a life, a companionship in truth with no more deception—

HJALMAR. Yes, I know, I know all that.

GREGERS. I was really positive that when I came through that door I'd be met by a transfigured light in both your faces. And what do I see instead but this gloomy, heavy, dismal—

GINA. How true. [*She removes the lampshade.*]

GREGERS. You don't want to understand me, Mrs. Ekdal. No, no, you'll need time— But you yourself, Hjalmar? You must have gained a sense of high purpose out of this great unburdening.

HJALMAR. Yes, naturally. That is—more or less.

GREGERS. Because there's nothing in the world that compares with showing mercy to a sinner and lifting her up in the arms of love.

HJALMAR. Do you think a man can recover so easily from the bitter cup I've just emptied!

GREGERS. Not an ordinary man, no. But a man like you—!

HJALMAR. Good Lord, yes, I know that. But you mustn't be driving me, Gregers. You see, these things take time.

GREGERS. You've *lots* of the wild duck in you, Hjalmar.

[RELLING *has entered through the hall door.*]

RELLING. Aha! The wild duck's flying again, eh?

HJALMAR. Yes, the wounded trophy of old Werle's hunt.

RELLING. Old Werle? Is it him you're talking about?

HJALMAR. Him and—all of us.

RELLING [*under his breath to GREGERS*]. The devil take you!

HJALMAR. What'd you say?

RELLING. I merely expressed my heartfelt desire that this quack would cut out for home. If he stays here, he's just the man to ruin you both.

GREGERS. They won't be ruined, Mr. Relling. Regarding Hjalmar, I'll say nothing. We know him. But she, too, surely, in the depths of her being, has something authentic, something sincere.

GINA [*near tears*]. Well, if I *was* that, why didn't you leave me alone?

RELLING [*to GREGERS*]. Would it be nosy to ask what you're really trying to do in this house?

GREGERS. I want to establish a true marriage.

RELLING. Then you don't think Ekdal's marriage is good enough as it is?

GREGERS. It's about as good a marriage as most, unfortunately. But it isn't yet a *true* marriage.

HJALMAR. You don't believe in ideals in life, Relling.

RELLING. Nonsense, sonny boy! Excuse me, Mr. Werle, but how many—in round numbers—how many “true marriages” have you seen in your time?

GREGERS. I believe I've hardly seen a single one.

RELLING. And I likewise.

GREGERS. But I've seen innumerable marriages of the opposite kind. And I've had a chance to see at close range what such a marriage can destroy in two people.

HJALMAR. A man's whole moral foundation can crumble under his feet; that's the dreadful thing.

RELLING. Well, I've never really exactly been married, so I'm no judge

of these things. But I do know this, that the child is part of the marriage too. And you've got to leave the child in peace.

HJALMAR. Ah, Hedvig! My poor Hedvig!

RELLING. Yes, you'll please see that Hedvig's left out of it. You're both grown people; you're free, God knows, to slop up your private lives all you want. But I tell you, you've got to be careful with Hedvig, or else you might do her some serious harm.

HJALMAR. Harm!

RELLING. Yes, or she could do harm to herself—and possibly others as well.

GINA. But how can you know that, Relling?

HJALMAR. There's no immediate threat to her eyes, is there?

RELLING. This has nothing to do with her eyes. Hedvig's arrived at a difficult age. She's open to all kinds of erratic ideas.

GINA. You know—she is at that! She's begun to fool around something awful with the fire in the kitchen stove. She calls it playing house afire. I'm often scared she *will* set the house on fire.

RELLING. See what I mean? I knew it.

GREGERS [*to* RELING]. But how do you explain something like that?

RELLING [*brusquely*]. Her voice is changing, junior.

HJALMAR. As long as the child has *me*! As long as I'm above the sod.

[*A knock is heard at the door.*]

GINA. Shh, Hjalmar, someone's in the hall. [*Calling out.*] Come on in!

[*MRS. SØRBY, wearing street clothes, enters.*]

MRS. SØRBY. Good evening!

GINA [*going toward her*]. Is it you, Berta!

MRS. SØRBY. Oh yes, it's me. But perhaps I came at an awkward time?

HJALMAR. Oh, not at all; a messenger from *that* house—

MRS. SØRBY [*to* GINA]. As a matter of fact, I'd hoped that I wouldn't find your menfolk in at this hour, so I ran over just to have a word with you and say good-bye.

GINA. Oh? Are you going away?

MRS. SØRBY. Yes, tomorrow, early—up to Hoidal. Mr. Werle left this afternoon. [*Casually to* GREGERS.] He sends his regards.

GINA. Just think!

HJALMAR. So Mr. Werle has left? And you're following him?

MRS. SØRBY. Yes, what do you say to that, Ekdal?

HJALMAR. I say watch out.

GREGERS. Let me explain. My father is marrying Mrs. Sørby.

HJALMAR. He's marrying her!

GINA. Oh, Berta, it's come at last!

RELLING [*his voice quavering slightly*]. This really can't be true.

MRS. SØRBY. Yes, my dear Relling, it's completely true.

RELLING. You want to marry again?

MRS. SØRBY. Yes, so it seems. Werle has gotten a special license, and we're going to have a very quiet wedding up at the works.

GREGERS. So I ought to wish you happiness, like a good stepson.

MRS. SØRBY. Thank you, if you really mean it. I'm hoping it will bring us happiness, both Werle and me.

RELLING. That's a reasonable hope. Mr. Werle never gets drunk—as far

as I know; and he's certainly not given to beating up his wives the way the late horse doctor did.

MRS. SØRBY. Oh, now let Sørby rest in peace. He did have some worthy traits, you know.

RELLING. Old Werle's traits are worth rather more, I'll bet.

MRS. SØRBY. At least he hasn't wasted the best that's in him. Any man who does *that* has to take the consequences.

RELLING. Tonight I'm going out with Molvik.

MRS. SØRBY. You shouldn't, Relling. Don't do it—for my sake.

RELLING. What else is left? [*To HJALMAR.*] If you'd care to, you could come too.

GINA. No, thanks. Hjalmar never goes dissipating.

HJALMAR [*in an angry undertone*]. Can't you keep quiet!

RELLING. Good-bye, Mrs.—Werle. [*He goes out the hall door.*]

GREGERS [*to MRS SØRBY*]. It would seem that you and Dr. Relling know each other quite intimately.

MRS. SØRBY. Yes, we've known each other for many years. At one time something might have developed between us.

GREGERS. It was certainly lucky for you that it didn't.

MRS. SØRBY. Yes, that's true enough. But I've always been wary of following my impulses. After all, a woman can't just throw herself away.

GREGERS. Aren't you even a little bit afraid that I'll drop my father a hint about this old friendship?

MRS. SØRBY. You can be sure I've told him myself.

GREGERS. Oh?

MRS. SØRBY. Your father knows every last scrap of gossip that holds any grain of truth about me. I told him all of those things; it was the first thing I did when he made his intentions clear.

GREGERS. Then I think you're more frank than most people.

MRS. SØRBY. I've always been frank. In the long run, it's the best thing for us women to be.

HJALMAR. What do you say to that, Gina?

GINA. Oh, women are all so different. Some live one way and some live another.

MRS. SØRBY. Well, Gina, I do think it's wisest to handle things as I have. And Werle, for his part, hasn't held back anything either. Really, it's this that's brought us so close together. Now he can sit and talk to me as freely as a child. He's never had that chance before. He, a healthy, vigorous man, had to spend his whole youth and all his best years hearing nothing but sermons on his sins. And generally those sermons were aimed at the most imaginary failings—at least from what I could see.

GINA. Yes, that's just as true as you say.

GREGERS. If you women are going to explore this subject, I'd better leave.

MRS. SØRBY. You can just as well stay, for that matter; I won't say another word. But I did want you to understand that I haven't done anything sly or in any way underhanded. I suppose it looks like I've had quite a nice piece of luck, and that's true enough, up to a point. But, anyway, what I mean is that I'll not be taking any more than I give. One thing I'll never do is desert him.

And I can be useful to him and care for him now better than anyone else after he's helpless.

HJALMAR. After he's helpless?

GREGERS [*to MRS. SØRBY*]. All right, don't talk about that here.

MRS. SØRBY. No need to hide it any longer, much as he'd like to. He's going blind.

HJALMAR [*astounded*]. He's going blind? But that's peculiar. Is he going blind too?

GINA. Lots of people do.

MRS. SØRBY. And you can imagine what that means for a businessman. Well, I'll try to make my eyes do for his as well as I can. But I mustn't stay any longer; I've so much to take care of now. Oh yes, I was supposed to tell you this, Ekdal—that if there's anything Werle can do for you, please just get in touch with Graaberg.

GREGERS. That offer Hjalmar Ekdal will certainly decline.

MRS. SØRBY. Come, now, I don't think that in the past he's—

GINA. No, Berta, Hjalmar doesn't need to take anything from Mr. Werle now.

HJALMAR [*slowly and ponderously*]. Would you greet your future husband from me and say that I intend very shortly to call on his bookkeeper, Graaberg—

GREGERS. What! Is that what you want?

HJALMAR. To call on his bookkeeper Graaberg, as I said, to request an itemized account of what I owe his employer. I shall repay this debt of honor—[*Laughs.*] That's a good name for it, "debt of honor"! But never mind. I shall repay every penny of it, with five percent interest.

GINA. But Hjalmar dear, God knows we don't have the money for that.

HJALMAR. Will you tell your husband-to-be that I'm working away relentlessly at my invention. Would you tell him that what keeps by spirits up through this grueling ordeal is the desire to be quit of a painful burden of debt. That's why I'm making my invention. The entire proceeds will be devoted to shedding my monetary ties with your imminent partner.

MRS. SØRBY. Something has really happened in this house.

HJALMAR. Yes, it certainly has.

MRS. SØRBY. Well, good-bye, then. I still have a little more to talk about with you, Gina, but that can keep till another time. Good-bye.

[HJALMAR and GREGERS *silently nod*; GINA *accompanies MRS. SØRBY to the door.*]

HJALMAR. Not across the threshold, Gina!

[MRS. SØRBY *leaves*; GINA *closes the door behind her.*]

HJALMAR. There, now, Gregers—now I've got that pressing debt off my hands.

GREGERS. You will soon, anyway.

HJALMAR. I believe my attitude could be called correct.

GREGERS. You're the man I always thought you were.

HJALMAR. In certain circumstances it's impossible not to feel the summons of the ideal. As the family provider, you know, I've got to writhe and groan beneath it. Believe you me, it's really no joke for a man without means to try and pay off a long-standing debt over which the dust of oblivion, so to

speak, had fallen. But it's got to be, all the same; my human self demands its rights.

GREGERS [*laying one hand on his shoulder*]. Ah, Hjalmar—wasn't it a good thing I came?

HJALMAR. Yes.

GREGERS. Getting a clear picture of the whole situation—wasn't that a good thing?

HJALMAR [*a bit impatiently*]. Of course it was good. But there's one thing that irks my sense of justice.

GREGERS. What's that?

HJALMAR. It's the fact that—oh, I don't know if I dare speak so freely about your father.

GREGERS. Don't hold back on my account.

HJALMAR. Well, uh—you see, I find something so irritating in the idea that I'm not the one, he's the one who's going to have the true marriage.

GREGERS. How can you say such a thing!

HJALMAR. But it's true. Your father and Mrs. Sørby are entering a marriage based on complete trust, one that's wholehearted and open on both sides. They haven't bottled up any secrets from each other; there isn't any reticence between them; they've declared—if you'll permit me—a mutual forgiveness of sins.

GREGERS. All right. So what?

HJALMAR. Yes, but that's the whole thing, then. You said yourself that the reason for all these difficulties was the founding of a true marriage.

GREGERS. But that marriage is a very different sort, Hjalmar. You certainly wouldn't compare either you or her with those two—well, you know what I mean.

HJALMAR. Still, I can't get over the idea that there's something in all this that violates my sense of justice. It really seems as if there's no just order to the universe.

GINA. Good Lord, Hjalmar, you mustn't say such things.

GREGERS. Hm, let's not start on that question.

HJALMAR. But then, on the other hand, I can definitely make out what seems to be the meticulous hand of fate. He's going blind.

GINA. Oh, that's not for sure.

HJALMAR. That is indisputable. Anyway, we oughtn't to doubt it, because it's precisely this fact that reveals the just retribution. Years back he abused the blind faith of a fellow human being—

GREGERS. I'm afraid he's done that to many others.

HJALMAR. And now a pitiless, mysterious something comes and claims the old man's eyes in return.

GINA. What a horrible thing to say! It really frightens me.

HJALMAR. It's useful sometimes to go down deep into the night side of existence.

[HEDVIG, *in her hat and coat, comes in, happy and breathless, through the hall door.*]

GINA. Back so soon?

HEDVIG. Yes, I got tired of walking, and it was just as well, 'cause then I met someone down at the door.

HJALMAR. That must have been Mrs. Sørby.

HEDVIG. Yes.

HJALMAR [*pacing back and forth*]. I hope that's the last time you'll see her.

[*Silence. HEDVIG glances timidly from one to the other, as if trying to read their feelings.*]

HEDVIG [*coaxingly, as she approaches*]. Daddy.

HJALMAR. Well—what is it, Hedvig?

HEDVIG. Mrs. Sørby brought along something for me.

HJALMAR [*stopping*]. For you?

HEDVIG. Yes. It's something meant for tomorrow.

GINA. Berta's always brought some little gift for your birthday.

HJALMAR. What is it?

HEDVIG. No, you can't know that yet, because Mother has to bring it to me in bed first thing in the morning.

HJALMAR. Oh, all this conspiracy that I'm left out of!

HEDVIG [*hurriedly*]. Oh, you can see it all right. It's a big letter. [*She takes the letter out of her coat pocket.*]

HJALMAR. A letter, too?

HEDVIG. Well, it's only the letter. I guess the rest will come later. But just think—a letter! I've never gotten a real letter before. And on the outside there, it says "Miss." [*She reads.*] "Miss Hedvig Ekdal." Just think—that's me.

HJALMAR. Let me see the letter.

HEDVIG [*handing it over*]. See, there.

HJALMAR. That's old Werle's writing.

GINA. Are you positive, Hjalmar?

HJALMAR. See for yourself.

GINA. Oh, how would I know?

HJALMAR. Hedvig, mind if I open the letter—and read it?

HEDVIG. Sure. If you want to, go right ahead.

GINA. No, not tonight, Hjalmar. It's meant for tomorrow.

HEDVIG [*softly*]. Oh, won't you let him read it! It's got to be something good, and then Daddy'll be happy and things will be pleasant again.

HJALMAR. May I open it, then?

HEDVIG. Yes, please do, Daddy. It'll be fun to find out what it is.

HJALMAR. Good. [*He opens the envelope, takes out a sheet of paper, and reads it through with growing bewilderment.*] Now what's this all about?

GINA. But what does it say?

HEDVIG. Oh yes, Daddy—tell us!

HJALMAR. Be quiet. [*He reads it through once more, turns pale, then speaks with evident restraint.*] This is a deed of gift, Hedvig.

HEDVIG. Honestly? What am I getting?

HJALMAR. Read for yourself.

[*HEDVIG goes over to the lamp and reads for a moment.*]

HJALMAR [*clenching his fists, in almost a whisper*]. The eyes! The eyes—and now that letter!

HEDVIG [*interrupting her reading*]. Yes, but I think the gift is for Grandfather.

HJALMAR [*taking the letter from her*]. Gina—do you understand this?

GINA. I know nothing at all about it. Just tell me.

HJALMAR. Mr. Werle writes Hedvig to say that her old grandfather needn't trouble himself any longer with copying work, but that henceforth he can draw one hundred crowns a month from the office—

GREGERS. Aha!

HEDVIG. One hundred crowns, Mother! I read that.

GINA. That'll be nice for Grandfather.

HJALMAR. One hundred crowns, as long as he needs it. That means till death, of course.

GINA. Well, then he's provided for, poor dear.

HJALMAR. But there's more. You didn't read far enough, Hedvig. Afterwards this gift passes over to you.

HEDVIG. To me! All of it?

HJALMAR. You're assured the same income for the rest of your life, he writes. Hear that, Gina?

GINA. Yes, of course I heard.

HEDVIG. Imagine me getting all that money! [*Shaking HJALMAR.*] Daddy, Daddy, aren't you glad?

HJALMAR [*disengaging himself*]. Glad! [*Walking about the room.*] Ah, what vistas—what perspectives it offers me. Hedvig is the one, she's the one he remembers so bountifully.

GINA. Of course, because it's Hedvig's birthday.

HEDVIG. And anyway, you'll have it, Daddy. You know that I'll give all the money to you and Mother.

HJALMAR. To Mother, yes! There we have it.

GREGERS. Hjalmar, this is a trap that's been set for you.

HJALMAR. You think it could be another trap?

GREGERS. When he was here this morning, he said, "Hjalmar Ekdal is not the man you think he is."

HJALMAR. Not the man—!

GREGERS. "You'll find that out," he said.

HJALMAR. Find out if I could be bought off for a price, eh—!

HEDVIG. But Mother, what's this all about?

GINA. Go and take your things off.

[*HEDVIG, close to tears, goes out the kitchen door.*]

GREGERS. Yes, Hjalmar—now we'll see who's right, he or I.

HJALMAR [*slowly tearing the paper in half and putting both pieces on the table*]. That is my answer.

GREGERS. What I expected.

HJALMAR [*going over to GINA, who is standing by the stove, and speaking quietly*]. And now no more pretenses. If that thing between you and him was all over when you—came to be so terribly in love with me, as you put it—then why did he give us the means to get married?

GINA. Maybe he thought he could come and go here.

HJALMAR. Is that all? Wasn't he afraid of a certain possibility?

GINA. I don't know what you mean.

HJALMAR. I want to know if—your child has the right to live under my roof.

GINA [*draws herself up, her eyes flashing*]. And you can ask that?

HJALMAR. Just answer me this: does Hedvig belong to me—or—? Well!
GINA [*regarding him with chill defiance*]. I don't know.

HJALMAR [*with a slight quaver*]. You don't know!

GINA. How would I know that? A woman of my sort—

HJALMAR [*softly, turning from her*]. Then I have nothing more to do in this house.

GREGERS. You must think about this, Hjalmar.

HJALMAR [*putting on his overcoat*]. There's nothing to think about for a man like me.

GREGERS. Oh, there's so very much to think about. You three have got to stay together if you're ever going to win through to a self-sacrificial, forgiving spirit.

HJALMAR. I don't want that. Never, never! My hat! [*Takes his hat.*] My home is down in ruins around me. [*Breaks into tears.*] Gregers, I have no child!

HEDVIG [*who has opened the kitchen door*]. What are you saying! [*Running toward him.*] Daddy, Daddy!

GINA. Now look!

HJALMAR. Don't come near me, Hedvig! Keep away. I can't bear seeing you. Oh, the eyes! Good-bye. [*Starts for the door.*]

HEDVIG [*clinging fast to him and shrieking*]. Oh no! Oh no! Don't leave me.

GINA [*crying out*]. Watch the child, Hjalmar. Watch the child!

HJALMAR. I won't. I can't. I've got to get out—away from all this! [*He tears himself loose from HEDVIG and goes out through the hall door.*]

HEDVIG [*with desperate eyes*]. He's left us, Mother! He's left us! He'll never come back again!

GINA. Now don't cry, Hedvig. Daddy's coming back.

HEDVIG [*throws herself, sobbing, on the sofa*]. No, no, he'll never come home to us again.

GREGERS. Will you believe I've wanted everything for the best, Mrs. Ekdal?

GINA. Yes, I think I believe that—but God have mercy on you all the same.

HEDVIG [*lying on the sofa*]. I think I'll die from all this. What did I do to him? Mother, you've got to make him come home!

GINA. Yes, yes, yes, just be calm, and I'll step out and look for him. [*Putting on her coat.*] Maybe he's gone down to Relling's. But now don't you lie there, wailing away. Will you promise?

HEDVIG [*sobbing convulsively*]. Yes, I'll be all right—if only Daddy comes back.

GREGERS [*to GINA, about to leave*]. Wouldn't it be better, though, to let him fight through his painful battle first?

GINA. Oh, he can do that later. First of all, we've got to comfort the child. [*She goes out the hall door.*]

HEDVIG [*sitting up and drying her tears*]. Now you have to tell me what it's all about. Why does Daddy not want to see me any more?

GREGERS. That's something you mustn't ask until you're big and grown-up.

HEDVIG [*catching her breath*]. But I can't go on being so horribly unhappy

till I'm big and grown-up. I bet I know what it is. Perhaps I'm really not Daddy's child.

GREGERS [*disturbed*]. How could that ever be?

HEDVIG. Mother could have found me. And now maybe Daddy's found out. I've read about these things.

GREGERS. Well, but if that was the—

HEDVIG. Yes, I think he could love me even so. Or maybe more. The wild duck was sent us as a present too, and I'm terribly fond of it, all the same.

GREGERS [*divertingly*]. Of course, the wild duck, that's true. Let's talk a bit about the wild duck, Hedvig.

HEDVIG. The poor wild duck. He can't bear to see her again, either. Imagine, he wanted to wring her neck!

GREGERS. Oh, he certainly wouldn't do that.

HEDVIG. No, but that's what he said. And I think it was awful for Daddy to say, because each night I make a prayer for the wild duck and ask that she be delivered from death and everything evil.

GREGERS [*looking at her*]. Do you always say your prayers at night?

HEDVIG. Uh-huh.

GREGERS. Who taught you that?

HEDVIG. I taught myself, and that was once when Daddy was so sick and had leeches on his neck, and then he said he was in the jaws of death.

GREGERS. Oh yes?

HEDVIG. So I said a prayer for him when I went to bed. And I've kept it up ever since.

GREGERS. And now you pray for the wild duck, too?

HEDVIG. I thought it was best to put the wild duck in, because she was ailing so at the start.

GREGERS. Do you say morning prayers, too?

HEDVIG. No, not at all.

GREGERS. Why not morning prayers as well?

HEDVIG. In the morning it's light, and so there's nothing more to be afraid of.

GREGERS. And the wild duck you love so much—your father wants to wring her neck.

HEDVIG. No. He said it would be the best thing for him if he did, but for my sake he would spare her; and that was good of Daddy.

GREGERS [*coming closer*]. But what if you now, of your own free will, sacrificed the wild duck for *his* sake.

HEDVIG [*springing up*]. The wild duck!

GREGERS. What if you, in a sacrificing spirit, gave up the dearest thing you own and know in the whole world?

HEDVIG. Do you think that would help?

GREGERS. Try it, Hedvig.

HEDVIG [*softly, with shining eyes*]. Yes, I'll try it.

GREGERS. And the strength of mind, do you think you have it?

HEDVIG. I'll ask Grandpa to shoot the wild duck for me.

GREGERS. Yes, do that. But not a word to your mother about all this!

HEDVIG. Why not?

GREGERS. She doesn't understand us.

HEDVIG. The wild duck? I'll try it tomorrow, early.

[GINA comes in through the hall door.]

HEDVIG [going toward her]. Did you find him, Mother?

GINA. No. But I heard he'd looked in downstairs and gotten Relling along.

GREGERS. Are you sure of that?

GINA. Yes, I asked the janitor's wife. And Molvik was with them, she said.

GREGERS. And this, right when his mind needs nothing so much as to wrestle in solitude—!

GINA [taking off her coat]. Oh, men are strange ones, they are. God knows where Relling has led him! I ran over to Mrs. Eriksen's café, but they weren't there.

HEDVIG [struggling with her tears]. Oh, what if he never comes back again!

GREGERS. He will come back. I'll get a message to him tomorrow, and then you'll see just how quick he comes. Believe that, Hedvig, and sleep well. Good night. [He goes out the hall door.]

HEDVIG [throwing herself, sobbing, into GINA's arms]. Mother, Mother!

GINA [pats her on the back and sighs]. Ah, me, Relling was right. That's the way it goes when these crazy people come around, summoning up their ideals.

ACT V

HJALMAR EKDAL's studio. A cold, gray morning light filters in; wet snow lies on the huge panes of the skylight. GINA, wearing a pinafore, comes in from the kitchen, carrying a feather duster and a cleaning cloth, and makes for the living room door. At the same moment HEDVIG rushes in from the hallway.

GINA [stopping]. Well?

HEDVIG. You know, Mother, I'm pretty sure he's down at Relling's—

GINA. There, you see!

HEDVIG. 'Cause the janitor's wife said she heard Relling had two others with him when he came in last night.

GINA. That's about what I thought.

HEDVIG. But it's still no good if he won't come up to us.

GINA. At least I can go down there and talk with him.

[EKDAL, in dressing gown and slippers, smoking a pipe, appears in the doorway to his room.]

EKDAL. Say, Hjalmar— Isn't Hjalmar home?

GINA. No, he's gone out, I guess.

EKDAL. So early? In a raging blizzard like this? Oh, well, never mind; I'll take my morning walk alone, that's all.

[He pulls the loft door ajar, HEDVIG helping him. He goes in; she closes up after him.]

HEDVIG [lowering her voice]. Just think, Mother, when Grandpa finds out that Daddy's leaving us.

GINA. Go on, Grandpa won't hear anything of the kind. It was a real stroke of providence he wasn't here yesterday in all that racket.

HEDVIG. Yes, but—

[GREGERS comes in the hall entrance.]

GREGERS. Well? Had any reports on him?

GINA. He should be down at Relling's, they tell me.

GREGERS. With Relling! Did he really go out with those fellows?

GINA. Apparently.

GREGERS. Yes, but he who needed so much to be alone to pull himself together—!

GINA. Yes, just as you say.

[RELLING enters from the hall.]

HEDVIG [going toward him]. Is Daddy with you?

GINA [simultaneously]. Is he there?

RELLING. Yes, of course he is.

HEDVIG. And you never told us!

RELLING. Oh, I'm a beast. But first of all, I had that other beast to manage—you know, the demonic one, him—and then, next, I fell so sound asleep that—

GINA. What's Hjalmar been saying today?

RELLING. He's said absolutely nothing.

HEDVIG. Hasn't he talked at all?

RELLING. Not a blessed word.

GREGERS. No, no, I can well understand that.

GINA. But what's he doing, then?

RELLING. He's laid out on the sofa, snoring.

GINA. Oh? Yes, Hjalmar's great at snoring.

HEDVIG. He's asleep? Can he sleep?

RELLING. Well, so it seems.

GREGERS. It's conceivable—when all that strife of spirit has torn him.

GINA. And then he's never been used to roaming around the streets at night.

HEDVIG. Maybe it's a good thing that he's getting some sleep, Mother.

GINA. I think so too. But then it's just as well we don't rouse him too soon. Thanks a lot, Relling. Now I've got to clean and straighten up here a bit, and then— Come and help me, Hedvig.

[GINA and HEDVIG disappear into the living room.]

GREGERS [turning to RELING]. Have you an explanation for the spiritual upheaval taking place within Hjalmar Ekdal?

RELLING. For the life of me, I can't remember any spiritual upheaval in him.

GREGERS. What! At a time of crisis like this, when his life has been recast? How can you believe that a rare personality like Hjalmar—?

RELLING. Pah! Personality—him! If he's ever had a tendency toward anything so abnormal as what you call personality, it was ripped up, root and vine, by the time he was grown, and that's a fact.

GREGERS. That's rather surprising—with all the loving care he had as a child.

RELLING. From those two warped, hysterical maiden aunts, you mean?

GREGERS. I want to tell you they were women who always lived up to the highest ideals—yes, now of course you'll start mocking me again.

RELLING. No, I'm hardly in a mood for that. Besides, I'm well informed here; he's regurgitated any amount of rhetoric about his "twin soul-mothers." I really don't believe he has much to thank them for. Ekdal's misfortune is that in his circle he's always been taken for a shining light—

GREGERS. And isn't he, perhaps, exactly that? In his heart's core, I mean?

RELLING. I've never noticed anything of the kind. His father thinks so—but that's nothing; the old lieutenant's been a fool all his life.

GREGERS. He has, all his life, been a man with a childlike awareness; and that's something you just don't understand.

RELLING. Oh, sure! But back when our dear, sweet Hjalmar became a student of sorts, right away he got taken up by his classmates as the great beacon of the future. Oh, he was good-looking, the lout—pink and white—just the way little moon-eyed girls like boys. And then he had that excitable manner and that heart-winning tremor in his voice, and he was so cute and clever at declaiming other people's poems and ideas—

GREGERS [*indignantly*]. Is it Hjalmar Ekdal you're speaking of that way?

RELLING. Yes, with your permission. That's an inside look at him, this idol you're groveling in front of.

GREGERS. I really didn't think I was utterly blind.

RELLING. Well, you're not far from it. Because you're a sick man, you are. You know that.

GREGERS. There you're right.

RELLING. Oh yes. Your case has complications. First there's this virulent moralistic fever; and then something worse—you keep going off in deliriums of hero worship; you always have to have something to admire that's outside of yourself.

GREGERS. Yes, I certainly have to look for it outside myself.

RELLING. But you're so woefully wrong about these great miraculous beings you think you see and hear around you. You've simply come back to a squatter's cabin with your summons to the ideal; there's nobody solvent here.

GREGERS. If you've got no higher estimate of Hjalmar Ekdal than this, how can you ever enjoy seeing him day after day?

RELLING. Good Lord, I *am* supposed to be some kind of doctor, I'm ashamed to say. Well, then I ought to look after the poor sick people I live with.

GREGERS. Oh, come! Is Hjalmar Ekdal sick, too?

RELLING. Most of the world is sick, I'm afraid.

GREGERS. And what's your prescription for Hjalmar?

RELLING. My standard one. I try to keep up the vital lie in him.

GREGERS. The vital—lie? I don't think I heard—

RELLING. Oh yes, I said the vital lie. The vital lie, don't you see—that's the animating principle of life.

GREGERS. May I ask what kind of lie has infected Hjalmar?

RELLING. No, thanks, I don't betray secrets like that to quacks. You'd just be able to damage him all the more for me. My method is tested, though. I've also used it on Molvik. I made him "demonic." That was my remedy for him.

GREGERS. Then he isn't demonic?

RELLING. What the devil does it mean to be demonic? That's just some hogwash I thought up to keep life going in him. If I hadn't done that, the poor innocent mutt would have given in years ago to self-contempt and despair. And then take the old lieutenant! But he really discovered his own cure himself.

GREGERS. Lieutenant Ekdal? How so?

RELLING. Well, what do you think of this bear hunter going into a dark loft to stalk rabbits? There isn't a happier sportsman in the world than the old man when he's prowling around in that junkyard. Those four or five dried-out Christmas trees he's got—to him they're like all the green forests of Hoidal; the hens and the rooster—they're the game birds up in the fir tops; and the rabbits hopping across the floor—they're the bears that call up his youth again, out in the mountain air.

GREGERS. Poor, unhappy old Ekdal, yes. He certainly had to pare down his early ideals.

RELLING. While I remember it, Mr. Werle junior—don't use that exotic word *ideals*. Not when we've got a fine native word—*lies*.

GREGERS. You're implying the two have something in common?

RELLING. Yes, about like typhus and typhoid fever.

GREGERS. Dr. Relling, I won't rest till I've gotten Hjalmar out of your clutches.

RELLING. So much the worse for him. Deprive the average man of his vital lie, and you've robbed him of happiness as well. [*To HEDVIG, entering from the living room.*] Well, little wild-duck mother, now I'll go down and see if Papa's still lying and pondering his marvelous invention. [*He goes out the hall door.*]

GREGERS [*approaching HEDVIG*]. I can see by your face that it isn't done.

HEDVIG. What? Oh, about the wild duck. No.

GREGERS. Your courage failed you when the time came to act, I suppose.

HEDVIG. No, it's not exactly that. But when I woke up this morning early and thought of what we talked about, then it seemed so strange to me.

GREGERS. Strange?

HEDVIG. Yes, I don't know— Last night, right at the time, there was something so beautiful about it, but after I'd slept and then thought it over, it didn't seem like so much.

GREGERS. Ah, no, you couldn't grow up here without some taint in you.

HEDVIG. I don't care about that; if only Daddy would come up, then—

GREGERS. Oh, if only your eyes were really open to what makes life worth living—if only you had the true, joyful, courageous spirit of self-sacrifice, *then* you'd see him coming up to you. But I still have faith in you. [*He goes out the hall door.*]

[*HEDVIG wanders across the room, then starts into the kitchen. At that moment a knock comes on the loft door, HEDVIG goes over and opens it a space;*

EKDAL slips out, and she slides it shut again.]

EKDAL. Hm, a morning walk alone is no fun at all.

HEDVIG. Don't you want to go hunting, Grandpa?

EKDAL. The weather's no good for hunting. Awfully dark in there; you can hardly see ahead of you.

HEDVIG. Don't you ever want to shoot at anything but rabbits?

EKDAL. Aren't rabbits good enough, eh?

HEDVIG. Yes, but the wild duck, say?

EKDAL. Ha, ha! You're afraid I'll shoot the wild duck for you? Never in this world, dear. Never!

HEDVIG. No, you couldn't do that. It must be hard to shoot wild ducks.

EKDAL. Couldn't? I certainly could!

HEDVIG. How would you go about it, Grandpa?—I don't mean with *my* wild duck, but with others.

EKDAL. I'd be sure to shoot them in the breast, understand; that's the safest. And then they've got to be shot *against* the feathers, you see—not *with* the feathers.

HEDVIG. They die then, Grandpa?

EKDAL. Oh yes, they do indeed—if you shoot them right. Well, got to go in and clean up. Hm—you understand—hm. [*He goes into his room.*]

[HEDVIG waits a moment, glances at the living room door, goes to the bookcase, stands on tiptoe, takes down the double-barreled pistol from the shelf and looks at it. GINA, with duster and cloth, comes in from the living room. HEDVIG hastily sets down the pistol, unnoticed.]

GINA. Don't mess with your father's things, Hedvig.

HEDVIG [*leaving the bookcase*]. I was just straightening up a little.

GINA. Go out in the kitchen instead and make sure the coffee's still hot; I'll take a tray along to him when I go down.

[HEDVIG goes out; GINA begins to dust and clean up the studio. After a moment the hall door is cautiously opened, and HJALMAR peers in. He wears his overcoat, but no hat. He is unwashed, with tousled, unruly hair; his eyes are dull and inert.]

GINA [*standing rooted with duster in hand, looking at him*]. Don't tell me, Hjalmar—are you back after all?

HJALMAR [*steps in and answers in a thick voice*]. I'm back—but only for one moment.

GINA. Oh yes, I'm sure of that. But my goodness—what a sight you are!

HJALMAR. Sight?

GINA. And then your good winter coat! Well, it's done for.

HEDVIG [*at the kitchen door*]. Mother, should I— [*Seeing HJALMAR, giving a squeal of delight, and running toward him.*] Oh, Daddy, Daddy!

HJALMAR [*turning from her and waving her off*]. Get away! Get away! [*To GINA.*] Make her get away from me, will you!

GINA [*in an undertone*]. Go in the living room, Hedvig.

[HEDVIG silently goes out.]

HJALMAR [*with a busy air, pulling out the table drawer*]. I must have my books along. Where are my books?

GINA. What books?

HJALMAR. My scientific works, of course—the technical journals I use for my invention.

GINA [*looking over the bookshelves*]. Are these them, the ones without covers?

HJALMAR. Yes, exactly.

GINA [*putting a stack of booklets on the table.*] Could I get Hedvig to cut the pages for you?

HJALMAR. Nobody has to cut pages for me. [*A short silence.*]

GINA. Then it's definite that you're moving out, Hjalmar?

HJALMAR [*rummaging among the books*]. Yes, that would seem to me self-evident.

GINA. I see.

HJALMAR. How could I go on here and have my heart shattered every hour of the day!

GINA. God forgive you for thinking so badly of me.

HJALMAR. Show me proof—

GINA. I think *you're* the one to show proof.

HJALMAR. After your kind of past? There are certain standards—I'd like to call them ideal standards—

GINA. But Grandfather? What'll happen to him, poor dear?

HJALMAR. I know my duty; that helpless old soul leaves with me. I'm going downtown and make arrangements—hm—[*Hesitantly.*] Did anybody find my hat on the stairs?

GINA. No. Have you lost your hat?

HJALMAR. I had it on, naturally, when I came in last night; I'm positive of that. But today I couldn't find it.

GINA. My Lord, where did you go with those two stumblebumps?

HJALMAR. Oh, don't bother me with petty questions. Do you think I'm in a mood to remember details?

GINA. I just hope you didn't catch cold, Hjalmar. [*She goes out into the kitchen.*]

HJALMAR [*muttering to himself in exasperation, as he empties the table drawer*]. You're a sneak, Relling! A barbarian, that's what! Oh, snake in the grass! If I could just get someone to strangle you! [*He puts some old letters to one side, discovers the torn deed of the day before, picks it up and examines the pieces. He hurriedly puts them down as GINA enters.*]

GINA. [*setting a breakfast tray on the table*]. Here's a drop of something hot, if you care for it. And there's some bread and butter and a little salt meat.

HJALMAR [*glancing at the tray*]. Salt meat? Never under this roof! Of course I haven't enjoyed going without food for nearly twenty-four hours; but that doesn't matter—My notes! My unfinished memoirs! Where can I find my journal and my important papers? [*Opens the living room door, then draws back.*] There she is again!

GINA. Well, goodness, the child has to be somewhere.

HJALMAR. Come out. [*He stands aside, and HEDVIG, terrified comes into the studio.*]

HJALMAR [*with his hand on the doorknob, says to GINA*]. These last moments I'm spending in my former home, I'd like to be free from intruders—[*Goes into the living room.*]

HEDVIG [*rushing to her mother, her voice hushed and trembling*]. Does he mean me?

GINA. Stay in the kitchen, Hedvig. Or, no—go into your own room instead. [*Speaking to HJALMAR as she goes in to him.*] Just a minute, Hjalmar. Don't muss up the bureau like that; I know where everything is. [*HEDVIG*

stands for a moment as if frozen by fright and bewilderment, biting her lips to keep the tears back; then she clenches her fists convulsively.]

HEDVIG [softly]. The wild duck. [*She steals over and takes the pistol from the shelf, sets the loft door ajar, slips in and draws the door shut after her. HJALMAR and GINA start arguing in the living room.*]

HJALMAR [re-enters with some notebooks and old loose papers, which he lays on the table]. Oh, what good is that traveling bag! I've got a thousand things to take with me.

GINA [following with the traveling bag]. So leave everything else for the time being, and just take a shirt and a pair of shorts with you.

HJALMAR. Phew! These agonizing preparations! [*Takes off his overcoat and throws it on the sofa.*]

GINA. And there's your coffee getting cold, too.

HJALMAR. Hm. [*Unthinkingly takes a sip and then another.*]

GINA. The hardest thing for you will be to find another room like that, big enough for all the rabbits.

HJALMAR. What! Do I have to take all the rabbits with me, too?

GINA. Yes, Grandfather couldn't live without the rabbits, I'm sure.

HJALMAR. He's simply got to get used to it. The joys of life I have to renounce are higher than rabbits.

GINA [dusting the bookcase]. Should I put your flute in the traveling bag?

HJALMAR. No. No flute for me. But give me the pistol!

GINA. You want your pistol along?

HJALMAR. Yes. My loaded pistol.

GINA [looking for it]. It's gone. He must have taken it inside.

HJALMAR. Is he in the loft?

GINA. Of course he's in the loft.

HJALMAR. Hm—lonely old man. [*He takes a piece of bread and butter, eats it, and finishes the cup of coffee.*]

GINA. Now if we only hadn't rented the room, you could have moved in there.

HJALMAR. I should stay on under the same roof as—! Never! Never!

GINA. But couldn't you put up in the living room just for a day or two? You've got everything you need in there.

HJALMAR. Never within these walls!

GINA. Well, how about down with Relling and Molvik?

HJALMAR. Don't mention those barbarians' names! I can almost lose my appetite just thinking about them. Oh no, I've got to go out in sleet and snow—tramp from house to house and seek shelter for Father and me.

GINA. But you haven't any hat, Hjalmar! You've lost your hat.

HJALMAR. Oh, those two vermin, wallowing in sin! The hat will have to be bought. [*Taking another piece of bread and butter.*] Someone's got to make arrangements. I certainly don't intend to risk my life. [*Looking for something on the tray.*]

GINA. What are you looking for?

HJALMAR. Butter.

GINA. Butter's coming right up. [*Goes into the kitchen.*]

HJALMAR [calling after her]. Oh, never mind; I can just as easily eat dry bread.

GINA [*bringing in a butter dish*]. Look. It's fresh today. [*She passes him another cup of coffee. He sits on the sofa, spreads more butter on the bread, eats and drinks a moment in silence.*]

HJALMAR. Could I—without being annoyed by anybody—anybody at all—put up in the living room just for a day or two?

GINA. Yes, of course you could, if you want to.

HJALMAR. Because I can't see any possibility of getting all Father's things out in one trip.

GINA. And then there's this, too, that you've first got to tell him you're not living with us any longer.

HJALMAR [*pushing the coffee cup away*]. That too, yes. All these intricate affairs to unravel. I've got to clear my thinking; I need a breathing spell; I can't shoulder all these burdens in one day.

GINA. No, and not when the weather's like it is out.

HJALMAR [*picking up WERLE's letter*]. I see this letter's still kicking around.

GINA. Yes, I haven't touched it.

HJALMAR. This trash is nothing to me—

GINA. Well, I'm not going to use it for anything.

HJALMAR. All the same, there's no point in throwing it around helter-skelter. In all the confusion of my moving, it could easily—

GINA. I'll take good care of it, Hjalmar.

HJALMAR. First and foremost, the deed of gift is Father's; it's really his affair whether or not he wants to use it.

GINA [*sighing*]. Yes, poor old Father—

HJALMAR. Just for safety's sake—where would I find some paste?

GINA [*going to the bookcase*]. Here's the pastepot.

HJALMAR. And then a brush.

GINA. Here's a brush, too. [*Bringing both.*]

HJALMAR [*taking a pair of scissors*]. A strip of paper down the back, that's all. [*Cutting and pasting.*] Far be it from me to take liberties with another's property—least of all, a penniless old man's. No, nor with—the other person's. There, now. Let it lie a while. And when it's dry, then take it away. I don't want to set eyes on that document again. Ever!

[GREGERS enters from the hall.]

GREGERS [*somewhat surprised*]. What? Are you lounging in here, Hjalmar?

HJALMAR [*springing up*]. I was overcome by fatigue.

GREGERS. Still, you've had breakfast, I see.

HJALMAR. The body makes its claims now and then too.

GREGERS. What have you decided to do?

HJALMAR. For a man like me there's only one way open. I'm in the process of assembling my most important things. But that takes time, don't you know.

GINA [*a bit impatient*]. Should I get the room ready for you, or should I pack your bag?

HJALMAR [*after a vexed glance at GREGERS*]. Pack—and get the room ready!

GINA [*taking the traveling bag*]. All right, then I'll put in the shirt and the rest. [*She goes into the living room, shutting the door behind her.*]

GREGERS [*after a short silence*]. I never dreamed that things would end like this. Is it really necessary for you to leave house and home?

HJALMAR [*pacing restlessly about*]. What would you have me do? I wasn't made to be unhappy, Gregers. I've got to have it snug and secure and peaceful around me.

GREGERS. But why can't you, then? Give it a try. Now I'd say you have solid ground to build on—so make a fresh start. And don't forget you have your invention to live for, too.

HJALMAR. Oh, don't talk about the invention. That seems such a long way off.

GREGERS. Oh?

HJALMAR. Good Lord, yes. What would you really have me invent? Other people have invented so much already. It gets more difficult every day—

GREGERS. And you've put so much work in it.

HJALMAR. It was that dissolute Relling who got me started.

GREGERS. Relling?

HJALMAR. Yes, he was the one who first made me aware that I had a real talent for inventing something in photography.

GREGERS. Aha—that was Relling!

HJALMAR. Oh, I was so blissfully happy as a result. Not so much from the invention itself, but because Hedvig believed in it—believed in it with all the power and force of a child's mind. Yes, in other words, fool that I am, I've gone around imagining that she believed in it.

GREGERS. You can't really think that Hedvig could lie to you!

HJALMAR. Now I can think anything. It's Hedvig that ruins it all. She's managed to blot the sun right out of my life.

GREGERS. Hedvig! You mean Hedvig? How could she ever do that?

HJALMAR [*without answering*]. How inexpressibly I loved that child! How inexpressibly happy I was whenever I came home to my poor rooms and she came flying to meet me with those sweet, fluttering eyes. I was so unspeakably fond of her—and so I dreamed and deluded myself into thinking that she, too, was fond of me beyond words.

GREGERS. Can you call *that* just a delusion?

HJALMAR. How can I tell? I can't get anything out of Gina; and besides, she has no feeling at all for the ideal phase of these complications. But with you, Gregers, I feel impelled to open my mind. There's this horrible doubt—maybe Hedvig never really, truly has loved me.

GREGERS. She may perhaps give you proof that she has. [*Listening.*] What's that? I thought I heard the wild duck cry.

HJALMAR. The duck's quacking. Father's in the loft.

GREGERS. Is he? [*His face radiates joy.*] I tell you, you may yet have proof that your poor, misjudged Hedvig loves you!

HJALMAR. Oh, what proof could she give me? I don't dare hope to be reassured from that quarter.

GREGERS. Hedvig's completely free of deceit.

HJALMAR. Oh, Gregers, that's just what I can't be sure of. Who knows

what Gina and this Mrs. Sørby have whispered and gossiped about in all the times they've sat here? And Hedvig uses her ears, you know. Maybe the deed of gift wasn't such a surprise, after all. In fact, I seemed to get that impression.

GREGERS. What is this spirit that's gotten into you?

HJALMAR. I've had my eyes opened. Just wait—you'll see; the deed of gift is only the beginning. Mrs. Sørby has always cared a lot for Hedvig, and now she has the power to do what she wants for the child. They can take her away from me any time they like.

GREGERS. You're the last person in the world Hedvig would leave.

HJALMAR. Don't be too sure of that. If they stand beckoning her with all they have—? Oh, I who've loved her so inexpressibly! I who'd find my highest joy in taking her tenderly by the hand and leading her as one leads a child terrified of the dark through a huge, empty room! I can feel it now with such gnawing certainty; the poor photographer up in this attic has never meant much to her. She's merely been clever to keep on a good footing with him till the right time came.

GREGERS. You really don't believe that, Hjalmar.

HJALMAR. The worst thing is precisely that I don't know what to believe—that I'll never know. But can you honestly doubt that it's just what I'm saying? [*With a bitter laugh.*] Ah, you're just too idealistic, my dear Gregers! Suppose the others come with their hands full of riches and call out to the child: Leave him. Life waits for you here with us—

GREGERS [*quickly*]. Yes, then what?

HJALMAR. If I asked her then: Hedvig, are you willing to give up life for me? [*Laughs derisively.*] Yes, thanks—you'd hear all right what answer I'd get!

[*A pistol shot is heard in the loft.*]

GREGERS [*with a shout of joy*]. Hjalmar!

HJALMAR. Hear that. He's got to go hunting as well.

GINA [*coming in*]. Oh, Hjalmar, it sounds like Grandfather's shooting up the loft by himself.

HJALMAR. I'll take a look—

GREGERS [*animated and exalted*]. Wait now! Do you know what that was?

HJALMAR. Of course I know.

GREGERS. No, you don't know. But *I* do. That was the proof!

HJALMAR. What proof?

GREGERS. That was a child's sacrifice. She's had your father shoot the wild duck.

HJALMAR. Shoot the wild duck!

GINA. No, really—!

HJALMAR. What for?

GREGERS. She wanted to sacrifice to you the best thing she had in the world, because she thought then you'd have to love her again.

HJALMAR [*stirred, gently*]. Ah, that child!

GINA. Yes, the things she thinks of!

GREGERS. She only wants your love again, Hjalmar; she felt she couldn't live without it.

GINA [*struggling with tears*]. There you are, Hjalmar.

HJALMAR. Gina, where's she gone?

GINA [*sniffing*]. Poor thing. I guess she's out in the kitchen.

HJALMAR [*going over and flinging the kitchen door open*]. Hedvig, come! Come here to me! [*Looking about.*] No, she's not there.

GINA. Then she's in her own little room.

HJALMAR [*out of sight*]. No, she's not there either. [*Coming back in.*] She may have gone out.

GINA. Yes, you didn't want her around anywhere in the house.

HJALMAR. Oh, if only she comes home soon—so I can just let her know—! Things will work out now, Gregers—for now I really believe we can start life over again.

GREGERS [*quietly*]. I knew it; through the child everything rights itself. [*EKDAL appears at the door to his room; he is in full uniform and is absorbed in buckling his sword.*]

HJALMAR [*astonished*]. Father! Are you there?

GINA. Were you out gunning in your room?

EKDAL [*approaching angrily*]. So you've been hunting alone, eh, Hjalmar?

HJALMAR [*baffled and anxious*]. Then it wasn't you who fired a shot in the loft?

EKDAL. Me, shoot? Hm!

GREGERS [*shouting to HJALMAR*]. She's shot the wild duck herself!

HJALMAR. What is all this! [*Rushes to the loft doors, throws them open, looks in and cries:*] Hedvig!

GINA [*running to the door*]. Lord, what now!

HJALMAR [*going in*]. She's lying on the floor!

GINA [*simultaneously*]. Hedvig! [*Going into the loft.*] No, no, no!

EKDAL. Ha, ha! So she's a hunter, too.

[*HJALMAR, GINA, and GREGERS carry HEDVIG into the studio; her right hand hangs down and her fingers curve tightly about the pistol.*]

HJALMAR [*distraught*]. The pistol's gone off. She's wounded herself. Call for help! Help!

GINA [*running into the hall and calling downstairs*]. Relling! Relling! Dr. Relling, come up as quick as you can!

EKDAL [*hushed*]. The woods take revenge.

HJALMAR [*on his knees by her*]. She's just coming to now. She's coming to now—oh yes, yes.

GINA [*who has returned*]. Where is she wounded? I can't see anything— [*RELLING hurries in, and right after him, MOLVIK, who is without vest or tie, his dress coat open.*]

RELLING. What's up here?

GINA. They say Hedvig shot herself.

HJALMAR. Come here and help.

RELLING. Shot herself! [*He shoves the table to one side and begins to examine her.*]

HJALMAR [*kneeling still, looking anxiously up at him*]. It can't be serious? Huh, Relling? She's hardly bleeding. It can't be serious?

RELLING. How did this happen?

HJALMAR. Oh, how do I know—

GINA. She wanted to shoot the wild duck.

RELLING. The wild duck?

HJALMAR. The pistol must have gone off.

RELLING. Hm. I see.

EKDAL. The woods take revenge. But I'm not scared, even so. [*He goes into the loft, shutting the door after him.*]

HJALMAR. But Relling—why don't you say something?

RELLING. You can see for yourself that Hedvig is dead.

GINA [*breaking into tears*]. Oh, my child, my child!

GREGERS [*hoarsely*]. In the depths of the sea—

HJALMAR [*jumping up*]. No, no she *must* live! Oh, in God's name, Relling—just for a moment—just enough so I can tell her how inexpressibly I loved her all the time!

RELLING. It's reached the heart. Internal hemorrhage. She died on the spot.

HJALMAR. And I drove her from me like an animal! And she crept terrified into the loft and died out of love for me. [*Sobbing.*] Never to make it right again! Never to let her know—! [*Clenching his fists and crying to heaven.*] Oh, you up there—if you *do* exist. Why have you done this to me!

GINA. Hush, hush, you mustn't carry on like that. We just didn't deserve to keep her, I guess.

MOLVIK. The child isn't dead; she sleepeth.

RELLING. Rubbish!

HJALMAR [*becoming calm, going over to the sofa to stand, arms folded, looking at HEDVIG*]. There she lies, so stiff and still.

RELLING [*trying to remove the pistol*]. She holds it so tight, so tight.

GINA. No, no, Relling, don't break her grip. Let the gun be.

HJALMAR. She should have it with her.

GINA. Yes, let her. But the child shouldn't lie displayed out here. She ought to go into her own little room, she should. Give me a hand, Hjalmar.

[*HJALMAR and GINA lift HEDVIG between them.*]

HJALMAR [*as they carry her off*]. Oh, Gina, Gina, how can you bear it!

GINA. We must try to help each other. For now she belongs to us both, you know.

MOLVIK [*outstretching his arms and mumbling*]. Praise be to God. Dust to dust, dust to dust—

RELLING [*in a whisper*]. Shut up, you fool; you're drunk.

[*HJALMAR and GINA carry the body out through the kitchen door. RELLING closes it after them. MOLVIK steals out the hall door.*]

RELLING [*going over to GREGERS*]. Nobody's ever going to sell me the idea that this was an accident.

GREGERS [*who has stood in a convulsive fit of horror*]. Who can say how this awful thing happened?

RELLING. There are powder burns on her blouse. She must have aimed the pistol point-blank at her breast and fired.

GREGERS. Hedvig did not die in vain. Did you notice how grief freed the greatness in him?

RELLING. The grief of death brings out greatness in almost everyone. But how long do you think this glory will last with *him*?

GREGERS. I should think it would last and grow all his life.

RELLING. In less than a year little Hedvig will be nothing more to him than a pretty theme for recitations.

GREGERS. You dare say that about Hjalmar Ekdal!

RELLING. We'll be lectured on this when the first grass shows on her grave. Then you can hear him spewing out phrases about "the child torn too soon from her father's heart," and you'll have your chance to watch him souse himself in conceit and self-pity. Wait and see.

GREGERS. If you're right, and I'm wrong, then life isn't worth living.

RELLING. Oh, life would be good in spite of all, if we only could have some peace from these damned shysters who come badgering us poor people with their "summons to the ideal."

GREGERS [*staring straight ahead*]. In that case, I'm glad my destiny is what it is.

RELLING. Beg pardon—but what is your destiny?

GREGERS [*about to leave*]. To be the thirteenth man at the table.

RELLING. Oh, the hell you say.

COMMENTARY

In T. S. Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral*, the Archbishop Becket utters a sentence which has become famous—"Human kind," he says, "cannot bear very much reality."¹ The sad dictum may serve to summarize the purport of *The Wild Duck*. And the play goes on to suggest that it is wicked for one person to seek to impose upon another a greater amount of reality than can comfortably be borne. That this should be the "message" of a play by Henrik Ibsen came as a great surprise—indeed, a shock—when *The Wild Duck* was first presented in 1884.

And even now it is likely to startle any reader or playgoer acquainted with the author's characteristic early work. For Ibsen was an outstanding figure in the movement of modern art and intellect that subjected all existing institutions, and the conventions of thought and feeling, to relentless scrutiny in the interests of truth; it was the stern judgment of this movement that society is a contrivance to mask or evade or distort reality. The effort to discriminate between what is real and what is illusory is of course not a new endeavor for literature. But in the modern epoch it has been undertaken with a new particularity and aggressiveness, and by none more than by Ibsen. He had made his reputation with four plays—*Pillars of Society*, *A Doll's House*, *Ghosts*, and *An Enemy of the People*—and in each of them he had pressed home the view that falsehood, whether in the form of social lies and hypocrisy or of self-deception, weakens the fabric of life and deprives human kind of its dignity. Expectably enough, his work had met with resistance by the larger part of his audience, that is to say, the more conventional part. But by the same token, the "advanced" minority, a growing force in European culture, received him as a master of truth. In his lifetime and for many years after his death, people spoke of "Ibsenism," by which they meant the radical questioning of all established

¹ The sentence also appears in the first section of Eliot's "Burnt Norton."

and respectable modes of life and the unyielding opposition to sham and pretense. It can therefore be imagined with what bewilderment and dismay the Ibsenites received a play which said that truth may be dangerous to life, that not every man is worthy to tell it or receive it, and that the avoidance and concealment of the truth, or even a lie, may have a vital beneficence.

In speaking of the fate of Oedipus (see page 41), I remarked that although we feel apprehension as Oedipus approaches closer and closer to the knowledge that will destroy him, and although we may wish to warn him against continuing his investigation, we do not really want the dreadful truth to stay hidden from him. As I put it, "we do not want Oedipus to remain oblivious of the truth about himself. An Oedipus who prudently gave up his search would be an object of condescension, even of contempt . . ." This is of course pretty much the feeling on which Gregers Werle proceeds when he resolves to bestow on Hjalmar Ekdal the terrible gift of reality. Hjalmar does not know that his wife had once been secretly the mistress of the elder Werle and that he is not in point of biological fact the father of his daughter. Gregers discloses the true state of affairs because he wants Hjalmar to "face reality" in order to gain the dignity which is presumed to follow upon that disagreeable confrontation. Why, then, do we blame Gregers for making the revelation?

The answer is that Hjalmar is not Oedipus, as poor Hjalmar himself well knows until he is tempted to believe otherwise. Perhaps no moment in the play is more bitterly affecting than that in which, after the disclosure has been made, Hjalmar says, "Do you think a man can recover so easily from the bitter cup I've just emptied?" Gregers replies, "Not an ordinary man, no. But a man like you—!" And Hjalmar desperately and feebly tries to accept the moral heroism that has been ruthlessly thrust upon him: "Good Lord, -yes, I know that. But you mustn't be driving me, Gregers. You see, these things take time."

It may indeed be true that people cannot bear very much reality, but some can bear even less than others. Hjalmar is one of those who can bear scarcely any at all. Yet it might be said that in his weakness there is a kind of strength. Whatever his announced claims for himself may be, in his heart of hearts he estimates himself fairly accurately. Until Gregers comes into his life with high talk of what the "summons to the ideal" ought to mean to "a man like you," Hjalmar knows that in order to get through life he needs all the help that illusion can give him, and he takes all the help he can get. It is plain enough that Hjalmar does not really believe he will vindicate the family honor and rehabilitate his old father by making a fortune as an inventor, but the double pose of righter of wrongs and of lonely man of genius sustains and comforts him. We can scarcely suppose that the truth about his wife and daughter had all these years lain very far from his consciousness; if he had wanted to grasp it, he could have reached out for it long ago. He had no such desire, and in consequence he is established in a small but cozy way of life, provided with an affectionate wife who cheerfully performs not only her own tasks but his, and an adoring daughter; he lives in such self-esteem as may arise from the uncontradicted assertion of his natural superiority. In the light of his wife's goodness of heart, it is not of the least importance that this simple woman was once another man's mistress; in the light of his daughter's boundless affection and trust, it is of no consequence that he had not actually engendered her; and Hjalmar had seen to it that what did not matter was never allowed to come into

his consciousness. But once the explicit truth is forced upon him, it does its destructive work. We may feel that it should not have had the effect upon the poor man that it does have; we comment on the pettiness of his pride, on how accomplished he is in nursing his grievance. Yet if we consider the sexual ethos of his time, we recognize that only a saint or a philosopher could have received the revelation with magnanimous good sense. The fact that Hjalmar is neither saint nor philosopher does not decisively distinguish him from most men.

The device by which Ibsen suggests the possible beneficence of illusion is a charming one, and also deeply moving, even more in actual presentation on the stage than on the printed page—it is always an electrifying moment for the audience when the forest in the garret is first revealed to view. There is something strangely affecting in a fiction, a mere fancy, that stands before us as a palpable actuality, to be seen and entered into; and the actuality of the forest is made more than palpable by its being inhabited by the beautiful and tragic wild duck. When first the sliding door is pushed back to reveal the moonlit scene, we have the sense that we have been permitted to look out through Keats's "magic casements, opening on the foam / Of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn."

For the Ekdals, this fictive forest is a source not only of pleasure but of life itself. It calls forth their best emotions. Toward it, especially toward its most notable denizen, the wounded wild duck, Hedvig directs the natural grace of her spirit, and it is the means by which old Lieutenant Ekdal reconciles himself to his ruined old age. Even Hjalmar rises above his uneasy self-regard and surrenders to a childlike innocence when he comes under the spell of this avowed illusion, which so touchingly binds the family together. The little wilderness is a mere game which the Ekdals play, but into all the activities of human kind, even the most serious and practical, some element of the game is introduced; "make believe" and "as if" do not come to an end with childhood. And the "let's pretend" of play is the very essence of one of man's most characteristic and important activities, that of art.

Hjalmar's father, Lieutenant Ekdal, the simple-minded old hunter, who in his best days had been the mighty killer of actual bears, plays the forest game with the perfectly clear consciousness that it is a game, even though it is also, for him, life itself; and Hedvig plays it as a child, with an absolute commitment to it but with no real confusion of the fancy with reality. And when Hjalmar plays it, he too knows it for what it is. But there are illusions from which some people in *The Wild Duck* cannot detach themselves. Hjalmar must have some rôle which will conceal from his own perception and that of the world the fact that he is a man of no talent or distinction. In school he had been known as a great declaimer of poetry and therefore as a person of notable sensibility and high ideals, and it is partly the illusioned memory of Hjalmar as he was in the past that leads Gregers to intervene on behalf of his friend's moral dignity; Gregers accepts without question Hjalmar's claim to being a wronged man and an unfulfilled genius. Molvik, the former theological student, is a feckless drunkard but he takes heart from the rôle that Dr. Relling invents for him, that of a "demonic" character, a personality which manifests its power in the "wildness" of a supernal intoxication. As for Gregers himself, we can scarcely fail to see that his behavior as the uncompromising idealist is dictated not only by

his grievance against his robust father but also by his desire to acquire a moral status that will mask the emptiness of his unloving heart.

People like these, living by illusions of personal distinction, did not always exist. Like the bereaved doctor of Chekhov's "Enemies" (*Fiction*, pages 124 ff.) and Gabriel Conroy of Joyce's "The Dead" (*Fiction*, pages 200 ff.), they are the creatures of modernity, especially of that aspect of modernity which Hegel, in his *Philosophy of History*, called the "secularization of spirituality." What Hegel meant by that phrase is suggested by the authority that Ibsen himself achieved and the means by which he achieved it. Where once the moral life of human kind had been chiefly in the keeping of the Church, it was now, by Ibsen's time, increasingly in the charge of playwrights, novelists, poets, and philosophers. Where once life had been relatively simple under the Church's guidance or direction, it was now complex in response to the questioning of writers. Where once it had been concerned with the fulfilment of the duties that were appropriate to one's station in life, it was now concerned with the fulness of a person's life as an individual, with its integrity and dignity, with the proud, vexed commitment to the ideal, that new moral and spiritual sanction which would have been quite incomprehensible a century or two earlier. Ibsen had done much to forward the "secularization of spirituality" and to advance the new self-consciousness, demanding that people be heroes of the spirit. *The Wild Duck* was written in a moment of brilliant self-doubt. This was perhaps induced by the disaffection from his disciples that any master may feel when he perceives how his own hard-won ideas are distorted by those who make easy use of them. But this turning of Ibsen upon himself cannot be attributed merely to his desire to discomfit his Ibsenite followers and to detach himself from the doctrinaire conception of what he had done. It came also, we feel sure, from a magnanimous mind's awareness of the difficulty of life and the impossibility of forcing upon it any single rule, even that of reality.

THE THREE SISTERS

ANTON PAVLOVICH
CHEKHOV

1860-1904

CHARACTERS

OLGA SERGEYEVNA PROZOROV

IRINA SERGEYEVNA PROZOROV

MARYA SERGEYEVNA PROZOROV (Masha)

BARON NIKOLAI LVOVICH TUSENBACH, *an army lieutenant*

IVAN ROMANICH CHEBUTYKIN, *an army doctor*

VASSILY VASSILYEVICH SOLYONY, *an army captain*

ANFISA, *the nurse, an old woman of eighty*

FERAPONT, *an old porter from the County Council*

LIEUTENANT-COLONEL ALEXANDER IGNATYEVICH

VERSHININ, *battalion commander*

ANDREY SERGEYEVICH PROZOROV

FYODOR ILYICH KULYGIN, *a high school teacher and Masha's husband*

NATALYA IVANOVNA (Natasha), *fiancée and later Andrey's wife*

ALEXEY PETROVICH FEDOTIK, *an army second-lieutenant*

VLADIMIR KARLOVICH RODÉ, *an army second-lieutenant*

The action takes place in a provincial town.

ACT I

A drawing room in the Prozorovs' house: It is separated from a large ballroom at the back by a row of columns. It is midday; there is a cheerful sunshine outside. In the ballroom the table is being laid for lunch. OLGA, wearing the regulation dark-blue dress of a secondary school teacher, is correcting her pupils' work, standing or walking about as she does so. MASHA, in a black dress, is sitting reading a book, her hat on her lap. IRINA, in white, stands lost in thought.

OLGA. Father died just a year ago today, on the fifth of May—your birthday, Irina. I remember, it was very cold and it was snowing. It seemed to me I would never live through it; and you had fainted and were lying there quite still, just as if you were dead. And now—a year's gone by, and we talk about it so easily. You're dressed in white again, and your face is positively radiant . . . [*The clock strikes twelve.*] The clock struck twelve then, too. A pause. I remember, the band was playing as they carried father to the cemetery and they fired a salute. That was because he was the general in command of the brigade. And yet there weren't many people there. Of course, it was raining hard, and there was some snow, too.

IRINA. Why must we bring up all these memories?

[TUSENBACH, CHEBUTYKIN, and SOLYONY appear behind the columns by the table in the ballroom.]

OLGA. It's so warm today that we can keep the windows wide open, but the birches haven't any leaves yet. It was eleven years ago that father got his brigade and we left Moscow. I remember so well how everything was in bloom by now; it was warm and yet I remember everything there as though we'd left it only yesterday. Why, when I woke up this morning and saw the warm sun, saw that spring was here, my heart leapt with joy. I wanted so much to go home again. Go home to Moscow!

CHEBUTYKIN [*sarcastically to SOLYONY*]. A small chance of that!

TUSENBACH [*also to SOLYONY*]. Of course, it's nonsense.

[MASHA, absorbed in her book, whistles part of a song softly.]

OLGA. Stop whistling, Masha! How can you? [*A pause.*] I suppose being at school every day from morning till night gives me this constant headache. And my thoughts are as gloomy as those of an old woman. Honestly, I feel as if my strength and my youth were running out of me! Drop by drop; day by day; every day, for the last four years. . . . And one dream keeps growing stronger and stronger. . . .

IRINA. Go to Moscow! Sell the house, leave everything here, and go back to Moscow.

OLGA. Yes, to go back to Moscow! As soon as possible.

[CHEBUTYKIN and TUSENBACH laugh.]

IRINA. Andrey will probably be a professor soon, anyway he won't keep on living here. The only problem is poor Masha.

OLGA. Masha can come to Moscow every year and spend the whole summer with us.

[MASHA whistles a song softly.]

IRINA. Everything will take care of itself with God's help. [*Looking out of the window.*] How beautiful it is today! I don't know why I feel so joyful.

I woke up this morning and remembered it was my birthday, and suddenly I felt so happy. I thought of the time when we were children and mother was still alive. And then such wonderful thoughts came to me . . . such wonderful thoughts.

OLGA. You're all aglow today—lovelier than ever. And Masha is beautiful, too. Andrey could be good-looking, too, if he hadn't put on so much weight; it doesn't suit him. As for me, I've just aged and grown a lot thinner. I suppose it's because I get so angry with the girls at school. Anyway, today I'm free, I'm home, and my head doesn't ache, and I feel so much younger than I did yesterday. After all, I'm only twenty-eight, but . . . Oh well, I suppose everything that God wills must be right and good . . . and yet, it seems to me, if I had married and stayed at home it would have been better. [A pause.] I would have loved my husband, very much.

TUSENBACH [to SOLYONY]. Really, you talk such a lot of nonsense, I'm tired of listening to you. [Comes into the drawing room.] I forgot to tell you, Vershinin, our new battery commander, is coming to call today.

OLGA. Oh really, how nice.

IRINA. Is he old?

TUSENBACH. No, not very. Forty, forty-five at most. He seems like a good fellow. Not a fool, that's for sure. Only he talks a lot.

IRINA. Is he interesting?

TUSENBACH. Yes, so-so—only he has a wife, a mother-in-law, and two little girls. What's more, she's his second wife. He goes around calling on everybody and everywhere he goes he tells people that he has a wife and two little girls. He'll tell you the same thing. It seems his wife's half crazy. She wears her hair in long braids just like a girl, and she is always philosophizing, and frequently she attempts to commit suicide, apparently to annoy her husband. I'd have left a woman like that long ago, but he puts up with her and merely complains.

SOLYONY [entering the drawing room with CHEBUTYKIN]. With one hand I can lift only sixty pounds, but with two I can lift two hundred or even two hundred and forty pounds. From this I conclude that two men are not twice as strong as one, but three times, or even more. . . .

CHEBUTYKIN [reading a newspaper as he comes in]. For falling hair . . . two ounces of naphthalene to half a bottle of alcohol . . . dissolve and apply daily. [Writes it down in his notebook.] Must make a note of it! No I don't want it . . . [Scratches it out.] It doesn't matter.

IRINA. Ivan Romanich, dear Ivan Romanich!

CHEBUTYKIN. What is it, my child, what is it?

IRINA. Tell me, why is it I'm so happy today? It's just as if I were sailing along in a boat with big white sails, and above me the open, blue sky, and in the sky great white birds flying. Why is all this? Why?

CHEBUTYKIN [kissing both her hands tenderly]. My little white bird!

IRINA. You know when I woke up this morning, I suddenly felt I understood everything about the world, and I knew the way I ought to live. I know it all now, my dear Ivan Romanich. Man must work by the sweat of his brow whatever his class, for in that lies the whole meaning and purpose of his life; and his happiness and contentment, too. Oh, how good it must be to be a workman, getting up with the sun and digging ditches . . . or a farmer . . . or a

teacher, teaching little children, or an engineer on a railroad. Goodness! It's better to be an ox or a horse and work, than the kind of young woman who wakes up at twelve, drinks her coffee in bed, and then takes two hours dressing . . . How dreadful! You know how you long for a cool drink when it's hot? Well, that's the way I long for work. And if I don't get up early from now on and really work, you can give me up as a friend, Ivan Romanich.

CHEBUTYKIN [*tenderly*]. I will, my dear, I will . . .

OLGA. Father taught us to get up at seven o'clock and so Irina always wakes up at seven—but then she stays in bed till at least nine, thinking about something or other. And with such a serious expression on her face, too! [*Laughs.*]

IRINA. You think it's strange when I look serious because you always think of me as a little girl. I'm twenty, you know!

TUSENBACH. All this longing for work . . . My God! How well I can understand it! I have never worked in my life. I was born in Petersburg, that bleak and idle city—born into a family where work and worries were simply unknown. I remember a valet pulling off my boots for me when I came home from military school . . . I grumbled at the way he did it, and my mother looked on in admiration. She was quite surprised when other people looked at me in any other way. I was protected from work! But I doubt if they have succeeded in protecting me completely . . . yes, I doubt it very much! The time has come . . . a terrific storm is coming, in fact, it's almost here. It will blow away all the laziness, the indifference, the boredom, and the prejudice against work which is ruining our society. I'm going to work, and in twenty-five or thirty years everyone will be working. Every one of us!

CHEBUTYKIN. I'm not going to work.

TUSENBACH. You don't count.

SOLYONY [*to TUSENBACH*]. In twenty-five years you'll be dead, thank God. You'll probably die of a stroke in a year or two—or I'll lose my temper and put a bullet through your head, my friend. [*Takes a phial of perfume from his pocket and sprinkles his chest and hands.*]

CHEBUTYKIN [*laughing*]. Really, it's quite true; I haven't done any work since I left the University, no, not a bit. I haven't even read a book, only newspapers. [*Takes another newspaper out of his pocket.*] For instance, here . . . I know from the paper that there was a person called Dobrolyubov, but God only knows what he wrote about. I don't know anything. [*Someone knocks on the floor from downstairs.*] What's that . . . they're calling me downstairs, somebody must have come to see me. I'll be back in a moment . . . [*Going.*] I'm coming . . . [*Goes out hurriedly, stroking his beard.*]

IRINA. He's up to one of his little games.

TUSENBACH. Yes. He looked very solemn as he left. He's obviously going to give you a present.

IRINA. Oh, I wish he wouldn't.

OLGA. Yes, isn't it dreadful? He's always doing something silly.

MASHA. "A green oak grows by a curving shore, And round that oak hangs a golden chain" . . . [*Gets up as she sings under her breath.*]

OLGA. You're sad today, Masha.

[*MASHA puts on her hat singing.*]

OLGA. Where are you going?

MASHA. Home.

IRINA. That's a strange way to act.

TUSENBACH. What! Leaving your sister's birthday party?

MASHA. What's the difference? I'll be back later. Good-bye, my darling. And once again, I wish you health. . . . I wish you happiness. In the old days when father was alive we used to have thirty or forty officers at our parties. What gay parties we had! And today . . . what have we got today? A man and a half, and the place is as quiet as a tomb. I'm going home. I'm depressed today, I'm sad, so don't listen to me. [*Laughs through her tears.*] We'll talk later on, but goodbye for now, my dear. I'll go somewhere or other . . .

IRINA [*displeased*]. Really, you are such a . . .

OLGA [*tearfully*]. I understand you, Masha.

SOLYONY. When a man philosophizes, you'll get philosophy . . . or sophistry; but if a woman or a couple of women start philosophizing, you might as well forget it!

MASHA. What do you mean by that? You're a horrible man!

SOLYONY. Nothing. "He had hardly time to catch his breath / before the bear was hugging him to death." [*A pause.*]

MASHA [*to OLGA, crossly*]. Do stop that crying!

[*Enter ANFISA and FERAPONT, the latter carrying a large cake.*]

ANFISA. Come along, my dear, come in. Your boots are clean. [*To IRINA.*] A cake from Mr. Protopopov, at the Council Office. From Mihail Ivanich . . .

IRINA. Thank you. Please tell him I'm very grateful. [*Takes the cake.*]

FERAPONT. What's that, Miss?

IRINA [*louder*]. Thank Mr. Protopopov.

OLGA. Nurse, will you give him a piece of cake? Go along, Ferapont, they'll give you some cake.

FERAPONT. What's that, Miss?

ANFISA. Come along with me, my dear, come along. [*Goes out with*

FERAPONT.]

MASHA. I don't like that Protopopov, Mihail Potapich or Ivanich, or whatever it is. You shouldn't have invited him.

IRINA. I didn't invite him.

MASHA. Thank goodness.

[*Enter CHEBUTYKIN, followed by a maid carrying a silver samovar. Murmurs of astonishment and displeasure.*¹]

OLGA [*covering her face with her hands*]. A samovar! But this is dreadful! [*Goes through to the ballroom and stands by the table.*]

IRINA. My dear Ivan Romanich, what are you thinking of?

TUSENBACH [*laughing*]. Didn't I tell you?

MASHA. Ivan Romanich, you ought to be ashamed of yourself!

CHEBUTYKIN. My dear, sweet girls, I've no one in the world but you. You're dearer to me than anything in the world! I'm nearly sixty, I'm an old man, a lonely, insignificant old man. The only thing that's worth anything in me is my love for you, and if it weren't for you, really I would have been dead long ago. [*To IRINA.*] My dear, my sweet little girl, I've known you ever since you were born—I used to carry you in my arms—I loved your mother. . . .

¹ A samovar is a traditional wedding present.

IRINA. But why such an expensive present?

CHEBUTYKIN [*tearfully and crossly*]. Expensive present! Don't talk such nonsense! [*To the maid.*] Take the samovar to the other room. [*In a mocking tone, mimicking IRINA.*] Expensive presents! [*The maid takes the samovar to the ballroom.*]

ANFISA [*crosses the drawing room*]. Girls, a strange colonel has just arrived. He's taken off his coat and he's on his way up. Irinushka, do be nice to him, won't you. [*As she goes out.*] And it's time for lunch already . . . mercy on us . . .

TUSENBACH. It's Vershinin, I imagine.

[*Enter Vershinin.*]

TUSENBACH. Lieutenant-Colonel Vershinin!

VERSHININ [*to MASHA and IRINA*]. Allow me to introduce myself—Lieutenant-Colonel Vershinin. I'm very, very glad to be here at last. How you've changed!

IRINA. Please sit down. We're delighted to see you.

VERSHININ [*gayly*]. I'm so glad to see you, so glad! But there were three little girls. I don't remember their faces, but I knew your father, Colonel Prozorov, and I remember he had three little girls. Oh, yes, I saw them myself. I remember them quite well. How time flies! My, how it flies!

TUSENBACH. Alexander Ignatyevich comes from Moscow.

IRINA. From Moscow? You come from Moscow?

VERSHININ. Yes, from Moscow. Your father was a battery commander there, and I was an officer in his brigade. [*To MASHA.*] I seem to remember your face.

MASHA. I don't remember you.

IRINA. Olga, Olga! [*Calls towards the ballroom.*] Olga, come here! [*OLGA enters from the ballroom.*] It seems that Lieutenant-Colonel Vershinin comes from Moscow.

VERSHININ. You must be Olga Sergeyevna, the oldest. And you are Marya . . . and you are Irina, the youngest. . . .

OLGA. You're from Moscow?

VERSHININ. Yes, I studied in Moscow and entered the service there. I stayed there quite awhile, but then I was put in charge of a battery here—so I moved out here, you see. I don't really remember you, you know, I only remember that there were three sisters. I remember your father, though, I remember him very well. All I need to do is to close my eyes and I can see him standing there as if he were alive. I used to visit you in Moscow.

OLGA. I thought I remembered everybody, and yet . . .

VERSHININ. My Christian names are Alexander Ignatyevich.

IRINA. Alexander Ignatyevich, and you come from Moscow! Well, what a surprise!

OLGA. We're going to move there, you know.

IRINA. We're going in the fall. It's our home, we were born there . . . On old Basmanaya Street. [*Both laugh happily.*]

MASHA. Imagine, meeting someone from home so unexpectedly! [*Eagerly.*] I remember now. Do you remember, Olga, they used to talk of "the lovesick Major"? You were a Lieutenant then, weren't you, and you were in love with

someone or other, and everyone used to tease you about it. They called you "Major" for some reason or other.

VERSHININ [*laughs*]. That's it, that's it . . . "The lovesick Major," that's what they called me.

MASHA. In those days you only had a moustache . . . Oh, dear, how much older you look! [*Tearfully*.] How much older!

VERSHININ. Yes, I was still a young man in the days when they called me "the lovesick Major." I was in love then. It's different now.

OLGA. You've aged, yes, but you're certainly not an old man.

VERSHININ. I'm going on forty-three. How long has it been since you left Moscow?

IRINA. Eleven years. Now what are you crying for, Masha, you silly? [*Tearfully*.] You'll make me cry, too.

MASHA. I'm not crying. What street did you live on?

VERSHININ. On old Basmanaya.

OLGA. We did, too.

VERSHININ. At one time I lived on Nyemtsky Street. I used to walk from there to the Krasny Barracks, and I remember there was such a gloomy looking bridge I had to cross. I used to hear the noise of the water rushing under it. I remember how lonely and sad I felt there. [*A pause*.] But what a magnificently wide river you have here! It's a marvelous river!

OLGA. Yes, but this is a cold place, and there are too many mosquitoes.

VERSHININ. Really? I should have said you had a splendid climate here, a real Russian climate. Forests, a river . . . birch trees, too. Charming, unpretentious birch trees—I love them more than any other tree. It's nice living here. But there's one thing I can't understand: the train station is fifteen miles away, and no one knows why.

SOLYONY. I know why. [*Everyone looks at him*.] Because if the station were nearer, it wouldn't be so far away, and since it's so far away it can't be nearer.

[*An awkward silence*.]

TUSENBACH. You like your little joke, Vassily Vassilyevich.

OLGA. I'm sure I remember you now. I know I do.

VERSHININ. I knew your mother.

CHEBUTYKIN. She was a fine woman, God bless her!

IRINA. Mother is buried in Moscow.

OLGA. At the convent of Novo-Dievichye.

MASHA. Would you believe it, I'm even beginning to forget what she looked like. I suppose people will not remember us either. . . . We'll be forgotten.

VERSHININ. Yes, we'll all be forgotten. Such is our fate and we can't do anything about it. And what seems so very important to us now will be forgotten, and seem trivial. [*A pause*.] It's strange to think that we can't possibly tell what will be regarded as great and important in the future and what will be thought of as small and insignificant. Didn't the great discoveries of Copernicus—or of Columbus—appear useless and unimportant at first?—while the nonsense written by some eccentric was regarded as a revelation of a great new truth? It may well be that in time the life we live today will be considered primitive and ugly and strange, and perhaps even evil . . .

TUSENBACH. Who knows? It's just as possible that future generations will think of our age as great and remember us with respect. After all, we've done away with hangings and public torture, and there haven't been any invasions, although a lot of people still suffer.

SOLYONY [*in a high-pitched voice as if calling to chickens*]. Cluck, cluck, cluck! There's nothing our good Baron loves as much as philosophizing.

TUSENBACH. Vassily Vassilyevich, will you let me alone? I'm getting sick of it.

SOLYONY [*as before*]. Cluck, cluck, cluck! . . .

TUSENBACH [*to VERSHININ*]. All the suffering we see around us—and there's a great deal—proves that our society has achieved a higher standard of morality than . . .

VERSHININ. Yes, yes, of course.

CHEBUTYKIN. Baron, you just said that our age will be called great; but people are small . . . [*Gets up.*] Look how small I am.

[*A violin is played off-stage.*]

MASHA. That's our brother, Andrey, playing the violin.

IRINA. He's our scholar . . . He'll probably be a professor. Father was a soldier, but his son has chosen an academic career.

OLGA. We've been teasing him today. He thinks he's in love.

IRINA. With a girl who lives here. She'll probably come later on.

MASHA. Heavens, how she dresses! It's not that her clothes are not pretty, but she has no taste. She'll put on some weird-looking bright yellow skirt with a cheap-looking fringe, and then a red blouse to go with it. And she has such a scrubbed look. Andrey's not in love with her—I can't believe it; he's not that vulgar. I think he's playing the fool, just to annoy us. I heard yesterday that she's going to marry Protopopov, the chairman of the local board. I think that's an excellent idea. [*Calls through the side door.*] Andrey, come here, will you? Just for a minute.

[*Enter ANDREY.*]

OLGA. This is my brother, Andrey Sergeyevich.

VERSHININ. Vershinin.

ANDREY. Prozorov [*wipes the perspiration from his face*]. I understand you've been appointed battery commander here?

OLGA. What do you think, dear? Alexander Ignatyevich comes from Moscow.

ANDREY. Do you, really? Congratulations! You'll get no peace from my sisters now.

VERSHININ. I'm afraid your sisters must be bored with me already.

IRINA. See what a lovely picture frame Andrey gave me for my birthday. [*Shows him the frame.*] He made it himself.

VERSHININ [*looks at the frame, not knowing what to say*]. Yes, it's . . . it's very nice. . . .

IRINA. And do you see that frame on the piano? He made that, too.

[*Andrey waves his hand impatiently and walks off.*]

OLGA. He's a scholar, and he plays the violin, and he makes all sorts of things, too. In fact, he can do almost anything. Andrey, please, don't go. He's got such a bad habit—always walking away. Come here!

[MASHA and IRINA take him by the arms and lead him back, laughing.]

MASHA. Now you come here!

ANDREY. Leave me alone, please!

MASHA. What a silly! They used to call Alexander Ignatyevich "the lovesick major," and he didn't get annoyed.

VERSHININ. Not at all.

MASHA. I feel like calling you a "lovesick fiddler."

IRINA. Or a "lovesick professor."

OLGA. He's fallen in love! Our Andriusha's in love!

IRINA [*clapping her hands*]. Three cheers for Andriusha! Andriusha's in love!

CHEBUTYKIN. "Nature created us for love alone." [*Laughs loudly, still holding his paper in his hand.*]

ANDREY. That's enough, that's enough . . . [*Wipes his face.*] I didn't sleep all night, and I'm not feeling very well today. I read till four, and then I went to bed, but I couldn't sleep. I kept thinking about one thing and another . . . and it gets light so early; the sun just pours into my room. I'd like to translate a book from the English while I'm here during the summer.

VERSHININ. You read English?

ANDREY. Yes. My father—God bless him—inflicted education upon us. It sounds silly, I know, but I must confess that since he died I've begun to put on weight. It's almost as if I'd been relieved of the strain. I've gotten quite fat this past year. Yes, thanks to Father, my sisters and I know French, German, and English, and Irina here knows Italian, too. But what an effort it was!

MASHA. Knowing three languages in a town like this is an unnecessary luxury. In fact, not even a luxury, just a useless encumbrance . . . like having a sixth finger. We know a lot that's just useless.

VERSHININ. Really! [*Laughs.*] You know a lot that's useless! It seems to me that there's no place on earth, no matter how dull and depressing it may be, where intelligent and educated people aren't needed. Let's suppose that among the hundred thousand people living here, there are just three people like you—all the rest being uneducated and uncultured. Obviously, you can't hope to win out over the ignorance of the masses around you; in the course of your life, you'll have to give in little by little until you are lost in that crowd of one hundred thousand. Life will swallow you up, but not completely, for you'll have made some impression. After you've gone, perhaps there'll be six more people like you, then twelve, and so on, until finally most people will have become like you. Why, in two or three hundred years life on this earth will be wonderfully beautiful. Man longs for a life like that, and if he doesn't have it right now, he must imagine it, wait for it, dream about it, prepare for it; he must know more and see more than his father and his grandfather did. [*Laughs.*] And you complain because you know a lot that's useless.

MASHA [*takes off her hat*]. I'm staying for lunch.

IRINA [*with a sigh*]. Really, someone should have written all that down.

[ANDREY has left the room unnoticed.]

TUSENBACH. You say that in time to come life will be wonderfully beautiful. That's probably true. But if we're to have a part in it right now, at a distance so to speak, we've got to prepare for it and work for it.

VERSHININ [*gets up*]. Yes . . . Why, look at all the flowers! [*Looks*

around.] And what a marvelous house! How I envy you! All my life I seem to have lived in a small apartment, with two chairs and a sofa and a stove which always smokes. It's the flowers that I've missed in my life, flowers like these! . . . [Rubs his hands.] But then, it's no use thinking about it.

TUSENBACH. Yes, we must work. I suppose you think I'm just a sentimental German. But believe me, I'm not—I'm Russian. I don't know a word of German, and my father was a member of the Orthodox Church.

[A pause.]

VERSHININ [*walks up and down the room*]. You know, I often wonder what it would be like if we could begin our lives over again—deliberately, I mean, consciously . . . as if the life we'd already lived were just a kind of rough draft, and we could begin all over again with the final copy. If that happened, I think the things we'd all want most would be not to repeat ourselves. We'd try at least to create a new environment, say a house like this one, for instance, with flowers and lots of light. . . . I have a wife, as you know, and two little girls; and my wife's not very well, and . . . Well, if I could begin my life all over again, I wouldn't marry. . . . No, no!

[Enter KULYGIN in the uniform of a teacher.]

KULYGIN [*approaches IRINA*]. Congratulations, my dear sister—from the bottom of my heart, congratulations on your birthday. I wish you the best of health and everything else a girl of your age ought to have! And allow me to give you this little book. [*Hands her a book.*] It's the history of our school covering the whole fifty years of its existence. I wrote it myself. It's not much, of course—I wrote it in my spare time when I had nothing better to do—but, nevertheless, I hope you'll read it. Good morning to you all! [*To VERSHININ.*] Allow me to introduce myself. Kulygin's the name; I'm a teacher at the high school here. [*To IRINA.*] You'll find a list in the book of all the pupils who have graduated from our school during the last fifty years. "*Feci quod potui, faciant meliora potentes.*" [*Kisses MASHA.*]

IRINA. But you gave me this book last Easter!

KULYGIN [*laughs*]. Did I really? In that case, give it back to me—or no, better give it to the Colonel. Please take it, Colonel. Maybe you'll read it sometime when you've nothing better to do?

VERSHININ. Thank you very much. [*Prepares to leave.*] I'm very happy to have made your acquaintance . . .

OLGA. You aren't going, are you? . . . Really, you mustn't.

IRINA. You must stay and have lunch with us! Please do.

OLGA. Please do.

VERSHININ [*bows*]. It looks like I've interrupted your birthday party. I didn't know. Forgive me for not congratulating you. [*Goes into the ballroom with OLGA.*]

KULYGIN. Today is Sunday, my friends, a day of rest; let us rest and enjoy it, each according to his age and position in life! We shall have to take up the carpets and put them away till the winter . . . And we mustn't forget to put some naphthalene on them or Persian powder . . . The Romans were a healthy people because they knew how to work *and* how to rest. They had "*mens sana in corpore sano.*" Their life had a definite shape, a form . . . The headmaster says that the most important thing about life is form. . . . A thing that loses its form is finished—that's just as true of our ordinary, everyday

lives. [*Takes MASHA by the waist and laughs.*] Masha loves me. My wife loves me. Yes, and the curtains will have to be put away with the carpets, too . . . I'm happy today, very happy . . . Masha, we're invited to the headmaster's at four o'clock. A walk in the country has been arranged for the teachers and their families.

MASHA. I'm not going.

KULYGIN [*distressed*]. Masha, darling, why not?

MASHA. I'll tell you later . . . [*Crossly.*] All right, I'll come, only leave me alone now . . . [*Walks off.*]

KULYGIN. And after the walk we'll all spend the evening at the headmaster's house. In spite of his poor health, that man certainly tries to be pleasant. A fine, thoroughly enlightened man! A remarkable person! After the meeting yesterday he said to me: "I'm tired, Fyodor Ilyich. I'm tired!" [*Looks at the clock, then at his watch.*] Your clock is seven minutes fast. Yes, "I'm tired," he said.

[*The sound of the violin is heard off-stage.*]

OLGA. Will you all come and sit down, please! Lunch is ready. There's pie.

KULYGIN. Ah, Olga, my dear! Last night I worked till eleven, and I felt tired, but today I'm so happy. [*Goes to the table in the ballroom.*] My dear Olga!

CHEBUTYKIN [*puts the newspaper in his pocket and combs his beard*]. A pie? Excellent!

MASHA [*sternly to CHEBUTYKIN*]. Remember, no drinking today. Do you hear? It's bad for you.

CHEBUTYKIN. Never mind. I stopped that long ago! I haven't had a drink for two years. [*Impatiently.*] Anyway, my dear, what difference does it make?

MASHA. All the same, there'll be no drinking. Don't you dare! [*Crossly, but taking care that her husband does not hear.*] Damn, I'll have to spend another boring evening at the headmaster's!

TUSENBACH. I wouldn't go if I were you . . . It's very simple.

CHEBUTYKIN. Don't go, my dear.

MASHA. Oh, yes. Don't go! What a miserable life! It's intolerable . . . [*Goes into the ballroom.*]

CHEBUTYKIN [*follows her*]. Well, well! . . .

SOLYONY [*as he passes TUSENBACH on the way to the ballroom*]. Cluck, cluck, cluck!

TUSENBACH. Stop it, Vassily Vassilyevich. I've had enough . . .

SOLYONY. Cluck, cluck, cluck! . . .

KULYGIN [*gayly*]. Your health, Colonel! I'm a schoolteacher . . . and a member of the family. I'm Masha's husband. She has a sweet nature, such a very sweet nature!

VERSHININ. I think I'll have a little of this dark vodka. [*Drinks.*] Your health! [*To OLGA.*] It feels so good to be with you all. I'm so happy.

[*Only IRINA and TUSENBACH remain in the drawing-room.*]

IRINA. Masha's in a bad mood today. You know, she got married when she was eighteen, and she thought her husband was the most brilliant man in the world. It's different now. He's the kindest of men, but not the most brilliant.

OLGA [*impatiently*]. Andrey, will you please come?

ANDREY [*off-stage*]. I'm coming. [*Enters and goes to the table.*]

TUSENBACH. What are you thinking about?

IRINA. Oh, not much. You know, I don't like Solyony, he frightens me. He says such stupid things.

TUSENBACH. He's a strange man. I'm sorry for him, even though he annoys me. In fact, I feel more sorry for him than annoyed. I think he's shy. When he's alone with me, he can be most intelligent and very friendly, but in company he's offensive and rude. Don't go yet, let them sit down first. I just want to be close to you for a moment. What are you thinking about? [*A pause.*] You're twenty . . . and I'm still not thirty. We've got years and years ahead of us, a whole lifetime, all full of my love for you! . . .

IRINA. Don't talk to me about love, Nikolai Lvovich.

TUSENBACH [*not listening*]. Oh, I long so passionately for life, to work and aspire, and all this longing is a part of my love for you, Irina. And because you are beautiful, life is beautiful for me, too! What are you thinking about?

IRINA. You say that life is beautiful. Maybe it is—but what if it only seems to be beautiful? Our lives, I mean the lives of us three sisters, haven't been beautiful. The truth is that life has been stifling us, like weeds in a garden. I'm sorry I'm crying . . . I shouldn't . . . [*Quickly dries her eyes and smiles.*] We must work! work! The reason we feel depressed and have such a gloomy view of life is that we've never known what it is to really work. We're the children of parents who despised work . . . [*Enter NATALYA IVANOVNA. She is wearing a pink dress with a green belt.*]

NATASHA. They've gone into lunch already. . . . I'm late . . . [*Glances at herself in a mirror, adjusts her dress.*] Is my hair all right . . . [*Catches sight of IRINA.*] My dear Irina Sergeyevna, congratulations! [*Gives her a vigorous and prolonged kiss.*] You've got so many guests . . . I feel quite shy . . . How do you do, Baron?

OLGA [*enters the drawing room*]. Oh, there you are, Natalya Ivanovna! How are you, my dear? [*They kiss each other.*]

NATASHA. Congratulations! There are so many people here, I am so afraid . . .

OLGA. It's all right, they're all old friends. [*Alarmed, dropping her voice.*] You've got a green belt on! My dear, that must be a mistake!

NATASHA. Why, is it a bad omen, or what?

OLGA. No, but it just doesn't go with your dress . . . it looks so strange. . . .

NATASHA [*tearfully*]. Really? But it isn't really green, it's just sort of a dull color . . . [*Follows OLGA to the ballroom.*]

[*All are now seated at the table; the drawing room is empty.*]

KULYGIN. Irina, you know, I do wish you'd find yourself a good husband. It's high time you got married.

CHEBUTYKIN. You ought to be getting married, too, Natalya Ivanovna.

KULYGIN. Natalya Ivanovna already has a husband picked out.

MASHA [*strikes her plate with her fork*]. Let's have a glass of vodka! Oh, life is sweet—what the hell. . . .

KULYGIN. Masha, black mark for conduct!

VERSHININ. I say, this wine's very good. What's it made of?

SOLYONY. Beetles!

IRINA. Ugh! Ugh! How disgusting!

OLGA. We're having turkey and apple pie for dinner tonight. Thank

goodness, I'll be here all day today . . . tonight, too. You must all come this evening.

VERSHININ. Am I invited, too?

IRINA. Yes, please come.

NATASHA. There are no formalities here.

CHEBUTYKIN. "Nature created us for love alone . . ." [*Laughs.*]

ANDREY [*crossly*]. Will you stop it, please? Aren't you tired of it yet?

[*FEDOTIK and RODÉ come in with a large basket of flowers.*]

FEDOTIK. Look, they're eating already!

RODÉ [*in a loud voice*]. Eating? So they are.

FEDOTIK. Wait a minute. [*Takes a snapshot.*] One! Just one more! . . . [*Takes another snapshot.*] Two! That's all.

[*They pick up the basket and go into the ballroom where they are greeted uproariously.*]

RODÉ [*loudly*]. Congratulations, Irina Sergeyevna! I wish you the best of everything! Marvelous weather today, absolutely gorgeous. I've been out walking with the boys all morning long. You know I teach gym at the high school, don't you?

FEDOTIK. You may move now, Irina Sergeyevna, that is, if you want to. [*Takes snapshot.*] My, you look attractive today. [*Takes a top out of his pocket.*] By the way, look at this top. It's got a wonderful hum.

IRINA. How lovely!

MASHA. "A green oak grows by a curving shore, And round that oak hangs a golden chain." . . . A green chain around that oak . . . [*Peevishly.*] Why do I keep on saying that? Those lines have been going through my head all day long!

KULYGIN. Do you know, there are thirteen of us at the table?

RODÉ [*loudly*]. You don't really believe in those old superstitions, do you? [*Laughter.*]

KULYGIN. When there are thirteen at the table, it means that someone's in love. Is it you, by any chance, Ivan Romanich?

CHEBUTYKIN. Oh, I'm just an old sinner. . . . But what I can't make out is why Natalya Ivanovna looks so embarrassed.

[*Loud laughter. NATASHA runs out into the drawing room. ANDREY follows her.*]

ANDREY. Please, Natasha, don't pay any attention to them! Stop . . . wait a moment. . . . Please!

NATASHA. I feel so ashamed . . . I don't know what's the matter with me, and they're all laughing at me. I know it's bad manners to leave the table like that, but I just couldn't help it . . . I just couldn't. . . . [*Covers her face with her hands.*]

ANDREY. My darling, please, please don't be upset. Believe me, they aren't trying to hurt you, they're just teasing. My dearest, darling, they're really very kind, really they are, and they love us both. Come over here to the window, they can't see us here . . . [*Looks round.*]

NATASHA. You see, I'm not used to being with so many people.

ANDREY. Oh, how young you are, Natasha, how wonderfully, beautifully young! My darling, my darling, don't be worried! Believe me, believe me . . . I'm so happy, so full of love, of joy . . . No, they won't see us! They can't see us! Why do I love you, when did I fall in love? . . . I don't understand any-

thing. My precious, my sweet, my innocent girl, please—please marry me! I love you, I love you as I've never loved anybody . . . [*Kisses her.*]

[*Enter two officers who, seeing NATASHA and ANDREY kissing, stand and stare in amazement.*]

Curtain

ACT II

The scene is the same as in Act I. It is eight o'clock in the evening. The faint sound of an accordion is heard coming from the street. The stage is unlit. Enter NATALYA IVANOVNA in a dressing gown carrying a candle. She crosses the stage and stops by the door leading to ANDREY's room.

NATASHA. What are you doing, Andriusha? Reading? Oh, it's nothing. I only wanted you to know . . . [*Goes to another door, opens it, looks inside and shuts it again.*] No one's left a light. . . .

ANDREY [*enters with a book in his hand*]. What is it, Natasha?

NATASHA. I was just looking to see if anyone had left any lights burning. It's carnival week, and the servants are so excited about it . . . If you don't watch them anything can happen. Last night about midnight I happened to go into the dining room and—would you believe it?—there was a candle burning on the table. I haven't found out who lit it. [*Puts the candle down.*] What time is it?

ANDREY [*glances at his watch*]. Quarter past eight.

NATASHA. And Olga and Irina still out. They aren't back from work yet, poor things! Olga's still at some faculty meeting, and Irina's at the post office. [*Sighs.*] This morning I said to Irina: "Darling, please take care of yourself." But she won't listen. Did you say it was a quarter past eight? I'm afraid Bobik isn't well. Why does he get so cold? Yesterday he had a fever, but today he is cold all over. . . . I'm so worried!

ANDREY. It's all right, Natasha. The boy's all right.

NATASHA. Still, I think he ought to have a special diet. I'm so anxious about him. Oh, by the way, they tell me that some carnival party's supposed to be coming at nine. I'd rather they didn't come, Andriusha.

ANDREY. Well, I really don't know what I can do. They've been asked to come.

NATASHA. This morning the little angel woke up and looked at me, and suddenly he smiled. He recognized me. "Good morning, Bobik," I said, "good morning, my darling!" And he laughed. You know, babies understand everything; they understand us perfectly well. Anyway, Andriusha, I'll tell the servants not to let that carnival party in.

ANDREY [*irresolutely*]. Well . . . it's really for my sisters to decide, isn't it? It's their house, after all.

NATASHA. Yes, it's their house too. I'll tell them . . . They're so kind . . . [*Walks off.*] I've ordered pudding for supper. The doctor says you ought to eat nothing but pudding or you'll never get any thinner. [*Stops.*] Bobik feels so cold. I'm afraid his room is too cold for him. He ought to be in a warmer room,

at least until spring comes. For instance, Irina's room would be a perfect room for a baby: it's dry, and it's sunny all day long. I must tell her. She could share Olga's room for awhile . . . Anyway, she's never at home during the day, she just sleeps here . . . [A pause.] Andriusha, why don't you say something?

ANDREY. I was thinking . . . Anyway, what's there to say . . .

NATASHA. Well . . . What was it I was going to tell you? Oh, yes! Ferapont from the Council Office wants to see you about something.

ANDREY [yawns]. Tell him to come in.

[NATASHA goes out; ANDREY, bending over the candle which she has left behind, begins to read his book. Enter FERAPONT in an old shabby overcoat, his collar turned up, his ears muffled in a scarf.]

ANDREY. Hello, old man! What is it?

FERAPONT. The chairman's sent you these reports and a letter or something. Here! [Hands him the book and the letter.]

ANDREY. Thanks. That's all. By the way, why have you come so late? It's after eight.

FERAPONT. What's that?

ANDREY [raising his voice]. I said, why have you come so late? It's after eight.

FERAPONT. Yes, yes. The sun was shining when I came, but they wouldn't let me see you. The master's busy, they said. Well, if you're busy, you're busy. I'm in no hurry. [Thinking that ANDREY has said something.] How's that?

ANDREY. Nothing. [Turns over the pages of the register.] Tomorrow's Friday, there's no meeting, but I'll go to the office just the same . . . do some work. I'm so bored at home! . . . [A pause.] Yes, old man, how things change, what a fraud life is! It's strange. Why, today I picked up this notebook, I was bored and didn't have anything to do . . . Imagine, my lecture notes from the University . . . My God! Just think—I'm secretary of the local council now, and Protopopov's chairman, and the most I can ever hope for is to become a member of the council myself! I—a member of the local council! I, who dream every night that I'm a professor at the University of Moscow, a distinguished scholar, the pride of all Russia!

FERAPONT. I'm sorry, I wouldn't know. I don't hear very well.

ANDREY. Do you think I'd be talking to you like this if you could? I've got to talk to someone, and my wife doesn't seem to understand me, and as for my sisters . . . for some reason they frighten me. I'm afraid they'll laugh at me and I couldn't stand it . . . I don't drink and I don't like going to taverns, but how I'd enjoy just sitting at Tyestov's again, or the Great Moscow Restaurant! Just for an hour. Yes, old man, I would indeed!

FERAPONT. The other day at the office a contractor was telling me about some businessmen who were eating pancakes in Moscow. One of them ate forty pancakes and died. It was either forty or fifty, I can't remember for sure.

ANDREY. You can sit in some huge restaurant in Moscow and not know a soul, and no one knows you; yet somehow you feel that you belong there. . . . But here you know everybody, and everybody knows you, and yet you don't feel you belong here, no, not at all. . . . You're a stranger and all alone.

FERAPONT. What's that? [Pause.] The same man told me—of course, he could have been lying—that there's a long rope stretched all the way across Moscow.

ANDREY. Whatever for?

FERAPONT. I'm sorry, I don't know, but that's what he said.

ANDREY. Nonsense! [*Reads the book.*] Have you ever been to Moscow?

FERAPONT [*after a pause*]. No. It wasn't God's wish. [*A pause.*] Shall I go now?

ANDREY. Yes, you may go. Good-bye [*FERAPONT goes out.*] Good-bye. [*Reading.*] Come in the morning, I'll have some letters for you . . . You can go now. [*A pause.*] He's gone. [*A bell rings.*] Yes, that's how it is . . . [*Stretches and slowly goes to his room.*]

[*Singing is heard off-stage; a nurse is putting a baby to sleep. Enter MASHA and VERSHININ. While they talk together a maid lights a lamp and candles in the ballroom.*]

MASHA. I don't know. [*A pause.*] I don't know. Habit's a very important thing of course. For example, after Father died, it took a long time to get used to the idea of not having any orderlies around to wait on us. But even apart from habit, I think I'm perfectly justified in saying—and of course, this may be different in other places, but in this town the officers are certainly the nicest and most generous and best mannered people.

VERSHININ. I'm thirsty. I'd like some tea.

MASHA [*glances at her watch*]. They'll bring it in soon. You see, I was married when I was eighteen. I was so afraid of my husband because he was a teacher, and I had just finished school myself. He seemed terribly brilliant then, very learned and important. But now, unfortunately, it's quite different.

VERSHININ. Yes . . . I see . . .

MASHA. Oh, I'm not speaking of my husband—I'm used to him now—but there are so many vulgar and unpleasant and ill-mannered people here. Rudeness upsets me, it hurts me, I actually suffer when I meet someone who lacks refinement and courtesy. When I'm with my husband's colleagues, I'm simply miserable.

VERSHININ. Yes, I understand. But it seems to me it's all the same whether they are civilian or military, they are equally dull, in this town at least. It's all the same! If you talk to one of the local intelligentsia—civilian or military, he'll generally tell you that he's just worn out. It's either his wife, or his house, or his estate, or his horse, or something . . . We Russians are peculiarly given to exalted ideas—but why is it we always fall so short in life? Why is it, why?

MASHA. Why?

VERSHININ. Yes, why does his wife wear him out, why is he worried to death by his children? And what about *him* exhausting his wife and children?

MASHA. You're really depressed today, aren't you?

VERSHININ. Perhaps. I've had nothing to eat since morning. One of the girls isn't feeling very well, and when the children are sick, I get too worried. My conscience torments me for having given them a mother like theirs. Oh, if only you could have seen her this morning! What a despicable woman! We began quarrelling at seven and at nine I finally walked out and slammed the door. [*A pause.*] I never talk about it. Strange, it's only to you I complain. [*Kisses her hand.*] Don't be angry with me. I've nobody, nobody but you . . . [*A pause.*]

MASHA. What a noise the wind's making in the stove! Just before Father died the wind howled in the chimney. There, just like that.

VERSHININ. Are you superstitious?

MASHA. Yes.

VERSHININ. How strange. [*Kisses her hand.*] You really are a wonderful creature, a marvelous woman! Wonderful, magnificent! It's dark here, but I can see your eyes shining.

MASHA [*moves to another chair*]. There's more light over here.

VERSHININ. I love you, I love you, I love you . . . I love your eyes, love the way you move . . . I see them in my dreams. A wonderful, marvelous woman!

MASHA [*laughing softly*]. When you talk to me like that, somehow I can't help laughing, although I'm frightened. Don't do it again, please. [*Half-audibly.*] No . . . go on. I don't mind . . . [*Covers her face with her hands.*] I don't mind . . . Someone's coming . . . talk about something else.

[*Enter IRINA and TUSENBACH through the ballroom.*]

TUSENBACH. I have a triple-barrelled name—Baron Tusenbach-Krone-Alschauer—but actually I'm a Russian. I was baptized in the Orthodox Church, just like yourself. There's nothing German about me, except maybe the obstinate way I keep on pestering you. Look how I bring you home every night.

IRINA. How tired I am!

TUSENBACH. And I'll keep bringing you home every night for the next twenty years—unless you send me away . . . [*Noticing MASHA and VERSHININ, with pleasure.*] Oh, it's you! How are you!

IRINA. Well, here I am, home at last! [*To MASHA.*] A woman came into the office just as I was leaving. She wanted to send a wire to her brother in Saratov to tell him her son had just died, but she couldn't remember the address. So she sent it without an address, just to Saratov. She was crying and I was rude to her, for no reason at all. "I've no time to waste," I told her. It was stupid of me. Are the carnival people coming tonight?

MASHA. Yes.

IRINA [*sits down*]. How nice it is to relax! I'm so tired!

TUSENBACH [*smiling*]. When you get home from work, you look so young and so unhappy, somehow. [*A pause.*]

IRINA. I'm tired. No, I don't like working at the post office, I don't like it at all.

MASHA. You've gotten so much thinner . . . [*Whistles.*] You look younger, too, and your face is beginning to look like a little boy's.

TUSENBACH. It's the way she does her hair.

IRINA. I must get another job. This one doesn't suit me. It lacks all the things I long for and dream of. It's work without poetry, without meaning. [*Someone knocks at the floor from below.*] There's the Doctor knocking. [*To TUSENBACH.*] Will you answer him? I can't . . . I'm too tired. [*TUSENBACH knocks on the floor.*]

IRINA. He'll be up in a minute. We've got to do something about all this. Andrey and the Doctor went to the club last night and lost again. They say Andrey lost two hundred roubles.

MASHA [*with indifference*]. Well, what are we to do?

IRINA. He lost two weeks ago, and he lost in December, too. I wish he'd just lose everything as soon as possible. Perhaps then we'd leave for Moscow. Oh dear, I dream of Moscow every night. Sometimes I feel as if I were going

mad. [*Laughs.*] We're going back to Moscow in June. How many months are there till June? . . . February, March, April, May . . . almost half a year!

MASHA. We must be careful that Natasha doesn't find out about his gambling.

IRINA. I don't think she'd care.

[*Enter CHEBUTYKIN. He has been resting on his bed since dinner and has only just got up. He combs his beard, then sits down at the table and takes out a newspaper.*]

MASHA. Here he comes. Has he paid his rent yet?

IRINA [*laughs*]. No. Not a penny for the last eight months. He's probably forgotten.

MASHA [*laughs*]. Look, how solemnly he sits there!

[*They all laugh. A pause.*]

IRINA. Why are you so quiet, Alexander Ignatyevich?

VERSHININ. I don't know. I just want some tea. I'd give my life for a glass of tea! I haven't eaten anything since morning . . .

CHEBUTYKIN. Irina Sergeevna!

IRINA. What is it?

CHEBUTYKIN. Please come here. "*Venez ici!*"² [*IRINA goes over to him and sits down at the table.*] I can't do without you. [*IRINA lays out the cards for a game of solitaire.*]

VERSHININ. Well, if we can't have any tea, let's philosophize a bit, anyway.

TUSENBACH. Yes, fine idea. What about?

VERSHININ. What about? Well . . . let's try to imagine what life will be like after we're dead, say in two or three hundred years.

TUSENBACH. All right, then. . . . After we're dead, people will fly in balloons, fashions will change, the sixth sense will be discovered, and for all I know, even developed and used . . . But life itself won't be very different; it will still be mysterious, always difficult, yet filled with happiness. And in a thousand years people will still sigh and complain "How hard life is!"—and yet they'll still be afraid of death and unwilling to die, just as they are now.

VERSHININ [*after a moment's thought*]. Well, you know . . . How shall I put it? I think everything is bound to change gradually—in fact, it's changing before our very eyes. In two or three hundred years, maybe it will take a thousand—how long doesn't really matter—life will be different. It will be happy. Of course, we won't be able to share it, we work and . . . yes, we suffer in order to create it. That's the purpose of our life, and you might say that's the only happiness we shall ever have.

[*MASHA laughs quietly.*]

TUSENBACH. Why are you laughing?

MASHA. I don't know. I've been laughing all day today.

VERSHININ [*to TUSENBACH*]. I went to the same school as you did but I never went on to the Academy. I read a great deal of course, but I never know what books I ought to choose, and I probably read the wrong things. And yet the longer I live the more I want to know. I'm getting older—my hair's getting gray, and yet how little I know, how little! All the same, I think I do know one

² Chebutykin repeats in French what he has just said. The use of French conveyed an aura of intimacy; servants and children couldn't understand it.

thing which is not only true but also most important. I'm certain of it. Oh, if only I could convince you that there's not going to be any happiness for us and our generation, that there mustn't be and won't be . . . we must work and work. Happiness, well, that's for those who come after us, our remote descendants. [A pause.] So even if I'll never be happy, at least my grandchildren will be.

[FEDOTIK and RODÉ enter the ballroom; they sit down and sing quietly, one of them playing on a guitar.]

TUSENBACH. So you think it's useless to even dream of happiness! But what if I *am* happy?

VERSHININ. You're not.

TUSENBACH [*flinging up his hands and laughing*]. Obviously, we don't understand each other. How can I convince you?

[MASHA laughs quietly.]

TUSENBACH [*holds up a finger to her*]. She'll laugh at the drop of a hat! [To VERSHININ.] And life won't be any different, no, not only a couple of hundred years from now, but a million. Life doesn't change, it always goes on the same; it follows its own laws, which don't concern us and which we can't discover anyway. Think of the birds flying South in the autumn, the cranes, for instance: they just fly on and on. It doesn't matter what they're thinking, whether their heads are filled with great ideas or small ones, they just keep flying, not knowing where or why. And they'll go on flying no matter how many philosophers they happen to have flying with them. Let them philosophize as much as they like, as long as they go on flying.

MASHA. Isn't there some meaning?

TUSENBACH. Meaning? . . . Look there, it's snowing. What's the meaning of that? [A pause.]

MASHA. But man has to have some faith, or at least he's got to seek it, otherwise his life will be empty, empty . . . How can you live and not know why the cranes fly, why children are born, why the stars shine in the sky! . . . You must either know why you live, or else . . . nothing matters . . . everything's just nonsense and waste . . . [A pause.]

VERSHININ. Yes, it's sad when one's youth has gone.

MASHA. "It's a bore to be alive in this world, friends," that's what Gogol says.

TUSENBACH. And I say: it's impossible to argue with you, friends! Let's drop the subject.

CHEBUTYKIN [*reads out of the paper*]. Balzac was married in Berditchev.³

[IRINA sings softly to herself.]

CHEBUTYKIN. I think I'll make a note of that. [Writes.] Balzac was married in Berditchev. [Reads on.]

IRINA [*playing patience, pensively*]. Balzac was married in Berditchev.

TUSENBACH. Well, the die is cast. Did you know that I'd sent in my resignation, Marya Sergeyevna?

MASHA. So I heard. But what good will come of it? Besides, I don't like civilians.

TUSENBACH. Never mind. What kind of a soldier am I anyway? I'm not

³ Honoré de Balzac (1799-1850), the great French novelist, in the last year of his life married Mme. Hanska, a Polish widow, after a long liaison that did not, however, interfere with his numerous other affairs.

even handsome. Anyway, what difference does it make? I'll work. For once in my life, I'd like to work so hard that when I came home I'd collapse on my bed exhausted and go to sleep at once. [*Goes to ballroom.*] Working men must sleep well!

FEDOTIK [*to IRINA*]. I bought you some crayons at Pyshikov's, on Moscow Street. And this little penknife, too . . .

IRINA. You still treat me as if I were a little girl. I wish you'd realize that I've grown up. [*Takes the crayons and the penknife, joyfully.*] Oh, they're wonderful!

FEDOTIK. Look, I bought myself a knife, too. You see, it's got another blade here, and there's another . . . this is for cleaning your ears, and this for cutting your nails, and this is for cleaning them . . .

RODÉ [*in a loud voice*]. Doctor, how old are you?

CHEBUTYKIN. I? Thirty-two. [*Laughter.*]

FEDOTIK. I'll show you another kind of solitaire. [*Sets out the cards.*]

[*The samovar is brought in, and ANFISA attends to it. Shortly afterwards NATASHA comes in and begins to fuss around the table. SOLYONY enters, bows to the company and sits down at the table.*]

VERSHININ. My, what a wind there is tonight!

MASHA. Yes. I'm tired of winter. I've almost forgotten what summer is like.

IRINA [*playing solitaire*]. I'm going to go out. We'll get to Moscow!

FEDOTIK. No, you're not. See, the eight has to go on the two of spades. [*Laughs.*] That means you won't go to Moscow.

CHEBUTYKIN [*reads the paper*]. Tsitsiker. A smallpox epidemic is raging. . . .

ANFISA [*goes up to MASHA*]. Masha dear, the tea's ready. [*To VERSHININ.*] Will you please come to the table, your excellency? Forgive me, your name's slipped my memory . . .

MASHA. Bring it here, Nanny. I don't feel like getting it.

IRINA. Nanny!

ANFISA. I'm comi-ing!

NATASHA [*to SOLYONY*]. You know, even little babies understand what we say, they can understand us completely! Why, this morning I said to Bobik, "Good morning, Bobik, good morning, my precious!"—and he looked up at me in his special way. You can say it's only a mother's imagination, but it isn't, I promise you. No, no! He is really a most unusual child!

SOLYONY. If that child were mine, I'd fry him in a pan and eat him. [*Picks up his glass, goes into the drawing room and sits down in a corner.*]

NATASHA [*covers her face with her hands*]. What a rude, disgusting man!

MASHA. People don't even notice whether it's summer or winter when they're happy. If I lived in Moscow I wouldn't care what the weather was like.

VERSHININ. The other day I was reading the diary of some French minister—he wrote it in prison. He was convicted for his involvement in the fraud of the Panama affair.⁴ He writes with such enthusiasm and delight about the birds he can see through the prison window—the birds he never even

⁴ A French Panama Canal company in 1879 made an unsuccessful attempt to construct a canal across the isthmus. A sensational financial scandal ensued. (Note that Chekhov is incorrect in attributing this scandal to a time preceding Balzac's marriage.)

noticed when he was a minister. Of course, now that he's released he doesn't notice them any more . . . Just as you won't notice Moscow when you live there. We're not happy and we can't be happy; we only want happiness.

TUSENBACH [*picks up a box from the table*]. Where's all the candy gone?

IRINA. Solyony's eaten it.

TUSENBACH. All of it?

ANFISA [*serving VERSHININ with tea*]. Here's a letter for you, sir.

VERSHININ. For me? [*Takes the letter.*] From my daughter. [*Reads it.*] Yes, of course . . . Forgive me, Marya Sergeyevna, I'll just slip out quietly. I won't have any tea. [*Gets up, agitated.*] Always the same thing . . .

MASHA. What is it? Can't you tell me?

VERSHININ [*in a low voice*]. My wife's tried to poison herself again. I've just got to go. I'll leave without them seeing me. How horrible all this is. [*Kisses MASHA's hand.*] My dear, good, my sweet . . . I'll leave quietly out this way . . . [*Goes out.*]

ANFISA. Where's he going now? And I've just poured his tea! What a strange man!

MASHA [*flaring up*]. Leave me alone! Why do you keep pestering me? Why don't you leave me in peace? [*Goes to the table, cup in hand.*] I'm sick and tired of you, you silly old woman!

ANFISA. Why . . . But I didn't mean to offend you, dear.

ANDREY'S VOICE [*off-stage*]. Anfisa!

ANFISA [*mimics him*]. Anfisa! Sitting there in his study . . . ! [*Goes out.*]

MASHA [*by the table in the ballroom, crossly*]. Let me sit down somewhere! [*Fumbles up the cards laid out on the table.*] You take up the whole table with your cards! Drink your tea!

IRINA. How cross you are, Masha!

MASHA. Well, if I'm cross, don't talk to me, then. Just don't bother me!

CHEBUTYKIN [*laughs*]. Don't bother her! . . . Be careful you don't bother her!

MASHA. You may be sixty, but you're always jabbering about nothing, just like a baby . . .

NATASHA [*sighs*]. Masha dear, must you talk that way? You know, with your good looks you'd be thought so charming, even by the best people—yes, I honestly mean it—if only you wouldn't talk that way. "*Je vous prie, pardonnez moi, Marie, mais vous avez des manières un peu grossières.*"⁵

TUSENBACH [*with suppressed laughter*]. Give me . . . will you please pass me . . . Isn't there some cognac?

NATASHA. "*Il paraît que mon Bobik déjà ne dort pas*"⁶ . . . I think he's crying. He hasn't been feeling well today. I must go and take care of him . . . Excuse me. [*Goes out.*]

IRINA. Where has Alexander Ignatyevich gone?

MASHA. Home. His wife's done something crazy again.

TUSENBACH [*goes over to SOLYONY with a decanter of cognac*]. You always sit alone brooding about something or other—although there's no telling what

⁵ (French) Excuse me please, Masha, but your manners are a bit gross. (It is an affectation with Natasha to say what she can in French, which she uses rather awkwardly.)

⁶ (French) It seems that my Bobik is already awake.

about. Come, let's make up. Let's have a drink of cognac together. [*They drink.*] I suppose I'll have to play the piano all night tonight—a lot of trash . . . Oh, well!

SOLYONY. Why did you say "let's make up"? We haven't quarrelled.

TUSENBACH. You always make me feel that something is wrong between us. You're a strange character, that you must admit.

SOLYONY [*recites*]. "I am strange, who isn't strange? Be not wrath, Aleko!"

TUSENBACH. What's Aleko got to do with it? . . . [*A pause.*]

SOLYONY. When I'm alone with someone I'm all right, I'm just like everybody else. But when I'm in a group of people, I get depressed and shy, and . . . I talk all sorts of nonsense. All the same, I'm a damned sight more honest than a lot of people. And I can prove it, too.

TUSENBACH. You make me mad whenever you pester me when we're in company—but, you know for some reason I still like you . . . I'm going to get drunk tonight, I don't care what happens! Let's have another drink!

SOLYONY. Yes, let's [*A pause.*] I've never had anything against you personally, Baron. But I have the temperament of Lermontov.⁷ [*In a low voice.*] I even look something like Lermontov, at least that's what they say . . . [*Takes a scent bottle from his pocket and sprinkles some scent on his hands.*]

TUSENBACH. I have sent in my resignation! I've had enough! I've been thinking about it for five years now, and finally I've made up my mind. I'm going to work.

SOLYONY [*recites*]. "Be not wrath, Aleko . . . Forget, forget your dreams!" [*During the conversation ANDREY enters quietly with a book in his hand and sits down by the candle.*]

TUSENBACH. I'm going to work!

CHEBUTYKIN [*comes into the drawing room with IRINA*]. And the food was really Caucasian: onion soup, and then "*chehartma*"—that's a wonderful roast.

SOLYONY. "*Chereshma*" isn't meat at all; it's a plant, like an onion.

CHEBUTYKIN. No, no, my friend, "*chehartma*" isn't an onion, it's roast lamb.

SOLYONY. And I tell you "*chereshma*" is a kind of onion.

CHEBUTYKIN. Well, why should I argue with you about it? You've never been to the Caucasus and you've never eaten "*chehartma*."

SOLYONY. I haven't eaten it because I can't stand it. "*Chereshma*" smells just like garlic.

ANDREY [*imploringly*]. Stop it, my friends! Please stop it!

TUSENBACH. When's the carnival party coming?

IRINA. They said nine—that means any time now.

TUSENBACH [*embraces ANDREY and sings*]. "Oh, my porch, oh my beautiful new porch, my . . ."

ANDREY [*dances and sings*]. "With posts of maple wood . . ."

CHEBUTYKIN [*dances*]. "And fancy lattice-work . . ." [*Laughter.*]

TUSENBACH [*kisses ANDREY*]. Let's have a drink, what the hell! Andruisha,

⁷ Mikhail Yurievich Lermontov (1814–1841) was a Russian poet and novelist who, in his work and his life, was the outstanding example of the influence of Byronic romanticism in Russian literature. As a poet, he was second only to Pushkin in his time, and he made an important contribution to the development of the Russian novel.

let's drink to eternal friendship. I'll go to Moscow with you when you go back to the University.

SOLYONY. Which one? There are two universities in Moscow.

ANDREY. There's only one.

SOLYONY. I tell you there are two.

ANDREY. All right, let's make it three. The more the better.

SOLYONY. There are two universities in Moscow. [*Murmurs of protest and cries of "Hush!"*] There are two universities in Moscow, the old one and the new one. But if you don't want to listen to me, if what I say bothers you, I'll keep quiet. In fact, I'll leave . . . [*Goes out through one of the doors.*]

TUSENBACH. Bravo, bravo! [*Laughs.*] My friends, let's get started. I'll play for you. What a funny fellow that Solyony is! . . . [*Sits down at the piano and plays a waltz.*]

MASHA [*dances alone*]. The Baron is drunk, the Baron is drunk, the Baron is drunk . . .

[*Enter NATASHA.*]

NATASHA [*to CHEBUTYKIN*]. Ivan Romanich! [*Speaks to him, then goes out quietly.* CHEBUTYKIN touches TUSENBACH on the shoulder and whispers to him.]

IRINA. What is it?

CHEBUTYKIN. It's time we were going.

TUSENBACH. Yes, it's time we were going. Good night.

IRINA. But wait . . . What about the carnival people?

ANDREY [*embarrassed*]. They're not coming. You see, my dear, Natasha says that Bobik isn't feeling very well, and well . . . Anyway, I don't know . . . and I couldn't care less . . .

IRINA [*shrugs her shoulders*]. Bobik's not feeling well! . . .

MASHA. Forget it, so what! If they kick us out, well out we go! [*To IRINA.*] It isn't Bobik who's sick, it's her . . . Here! . . . [*Taps her forehead with her finger.*] Petty "*hausfrau*!"⁸

[ANDREY goes to his room on the right. CHEBUTYKIN follows him. The guests say good-bye in the ballroom.]

FEDOTIK. What a pity! I'd counted on spending the evening, but of course, if the baby's sick . . . I'll bring him some toys tomorrow.

RODÉ [*in a loud voice*]. I had a nap after lunch today on purpose, I thought I'd be dancing all night. Why, it's only nine o'clock.

MASHA. Let's go outside and talk about it. We can decide what to do then.

[*Voices are heard saying "Good-bye! God bless you!" and TUSENBACH is heard laughing gayly. Everyone goes out. ANFISA and a maid clear the table and put out the lights. The nurse sings to the baby off-stage. Enter ANDREY, wearing an overcoat and hat, followed by CHEBUTYKIN. They move quietly.*]

CHEBUTYKIN. I've never had time to get married, somehow . . . because my life's just flashed by like lightning, and because I was always very much in love with your mother and she was married . . .

ANDREY. One shouldn't marry. One shouldn't marry, it's so boring.

CHEBUTYKIN. That may be, but what about the loneliness? You can talk

⁸ (German) Housewife. The German word, used in any language, has a special connotation of contempt for the frequently bourgeois outlook of housewives.

all you want, my boy, but loneliness is a horrible thing. Though, as a matter of fact . . . oh well, what difference does it make! . . .

ANDREY. Let's get going.

CHEBUTYKIN. What's the hurry? We've plenty of time.

ANDREY. I'm afraid my wife'll stop me.

CHEBUTYKIN. Ah!

ANDREY. I won't gamble tonight, I'll just sit and watch. You know, I don't feel very well . . . What should I do for this shortness of breath, Ivan Romanich?

CHEBUTYKIN. Don't ask me. I can't remember, my boy—I really don't know.

ANDREY. Let's go through the kitchen.

[*They go out. A bell rings. The ring is repeated, then voices and laughter are heard.*]

IRINA [*coming in*]. Who is it?

ANFISA [*in a whisper*]. The carnival party.

[*The bell rings again.*]

IRINA. Tell them there's no one at home, Nanny. They'll have to excuse us.

[*ANFISA goes out. IRINA walks up and down the room, lost in thought. She seems agitated. Enter SOLYONY.*]

SOLYONY [*puzzled*]. No one here . . . Where is everybody?

IRINA. They've gone home.

SOLYONY. That's strange! Are you alone?

IRINA. Yes. [*A pause.*] Well . . . good night.

SOLYONY. I know I behaved tactlessly before, I just lost control of myself. But you're not like the others, you're high-minded—you're pure, you can see the truth . . . You're the only one who understands me. I love you . . . I love you with a deep, with an infinite . . .

IRINA. Go away, please. Good night!

SOLYONY. I can't live without you. [*Follows her.*] Oh it's so wonderful just to look at you! [*With tears.*] Oh, my joy! Your glorious, marvelous, bewitching eyes—the most beautiful eyes in all the world . . .

IRINA [*coldly*]. Vassily Vassilyevich, stop it!

SOLYONY. I've never spoken to you of my love before . . . it's as if I were living on a different planet . . . [*Rubs his forehead.*] Forget it! I can't make you love me. But there will be no successful rivals . . . I swear to you by all that's sacred that if there's anyone else, I'll kill him. Oh, how wonderful, how wonderful you are!

[*Enter NATASHA carrying a candle.*]

NATASHA [*pokes her head into one room, then into another, but passes the door leading to her husband's room*]. Andrey's reading. Might as well let him. Forgive me, Vassily Vassilyevich, I didn't know you were here. I'm afraid I'm not properly dressed.

SOLYONY. I don't care. Good-bye. [*Goes out.*]

NATASHA. You must be tired, my poor girl. [*Kisses IRINA.*] You should go to bed earlier.

IRINA. Is Bobik asleep?

NATASHA. Yes, but not very quietly. By the way, dear, I keep meaning to

speak to you, but then there's always been something . . . either you're not here, or I'm too busy . . . Bobik's nursery is so cold and damp . . . And your room is just perfect for a baby. Darling, I'm sure you won't mind moving in with Olga.

IRINA [*not understanding her*]. Where?

[*The sound of bells is heard outside, as a troika is driven up to the house.*]

NATASHA. You can share Olga's room—just for a little while—and Bobik can have your room. He is such a darling! This morning I said to him: "Bobik, you're my very own! My very own!" And he looked up at me with his sweet little eyes. [*The door bell rings.*] That must be Olga. How late she is! [*A maid comes up to NATASHA and whispers in her ear.*] Protopopov! What a strange man! Why, Protopopov's come to take me for a drive. In his troika. [*Laughs.*] How strange men are! . . . [*The door bell rings again.*] Somebody else's ringing. Shall I go out for a little bit? Just for a quarter of an hour? [*To the maid.*] Tell him I'll be right there. [*The door bell rings.*] There's the bell again. It must be Olga. [*Goes out.*]

[*The maid runs out; IRINA sits lost in thought. Enter KULYGIN and OLGA, followed by VERSHININ.*]

KULYGIN. Well! What's going on here? You said you were going to have a party.

VERSHININ. That's strange. I left not more than half an hour ago, and they were still expecting the party.

IRINA. They've all gone.

KULYGIN. Masha, too? Where did she go? And what's Protopopov doing outside in his troika? Who's he waiting for?

IRINA. Don't ask me questions please. I'm tired.

KULYGIN. You . . . spoiled child!

OLGA. The faculty meeting just ended. I'm exhausted. The headmistress is sick and I had to take her place. My head aches, oh, my head, my head . . . [*Sits down.*] Andrey lost again last night—two hundred roubles. The whole town's talking about it.

KULYGIN. Yes the meeting exhausted me, too. [*Sits down.*]

VERSHININ. So now my wife's decided to frighten me. She tried to poison herself. But it's all right now, so I can relax . . . So we have to leave? Well, good night. Fyodor Ilyich, let's go somewhere together? I can't go home yet, I just can't . . . Come!

KULYGIN. I'm tired. I don't think I'll come. [*Gets up.*] I'm tired. Has my wife gone home?

IRINA. She must have.

KULYGIN [*kisses IRINA's hand*]. Good night. We'll rest all day tomorrow and the day after tomorrow, two whole days! Well, I . . . ahh . . . [*Going out.*] My, I'd like some tea! I was planning on spending the evening in pleasant company, but—"o, fallacem hominum spem!"⁹ Accusative of exclamation.

VERSHININ. Well, it looks as if I'll have to go alone. [*Goes out with KULYGIN, whistling.*]

OLGA. My headaches, oh, how my head aches . . . Andrey lost at cards . . . the whole town's talking . . . I'll go and lie down. [*Going out.*] Tomorrow

⁹ (Latin) O fallacious hopes of man. (In the phrase that follows, Kulygin, mocking his own schoolteacher manner, gives a grammatical explanation of the Latin.)

I'm free. Goodness, how pleasant that will be. Tomorrow I'm free, and the day after tomorrow I'm free . . . Oh, my head aches, my head . . .

IRINA [*alone*]. They've all gone. There's no one left.

[*Someone is playing an accordion in the street. The nurse sings in the next room.*]

NATASHA [*crosses the ballroom, wearing a fur coat and cap. She is followed by the maid*]. I'll be back in half an hour. I'm just going for a short drive. [*Goes out.*]

IRINA [*alone, with intense dejection*]. Oh, to go to Moscow! To Moscow! Moscow!

Curtain.

ACT III

A bedroom shared by OLGA and IRINA. To the left and to the right are beds, each screened off from the rest of the room. It is going on three o'clock in the morning. Off-stage a fire alarm is ringing for a fire which has been raging some time. No one in the house has gone to bed. MASHA lies on the couch, dressed, as usual, in black. OLGA and ANFISA enter.

ANFISA. They're sitting there under the staircase. I keep telling them to come up here, but they just cry. "Where's our Daddy?" they say, "he's been burned in the fire." And then all those poor people out in the yard . . . half dressed . . . can you imagine thinking things like that!

OLGA [*takes a dress out of a wardrobe*]. Here, take this grey dress, Nurse . . . And this one . . . This blouse, too . . . And the skirt. Oh, Lord! what a dreadful night! It looks like all of Kirsanovsky Street's burned down . . . Take this . . . and this, too . . . [*Throws the clothes into ANFISA's arms.*] The poor Vershinins were frightened to death. Their house nearly burned down. They must spend the night here . . . we just can't let them go home. And poor Fedotik's lost everything, too, he's got nothing left. . . .

ANFISA. You'll have to call Ferapont, Olyushka, I can't carry all this.

OLGA [*rings*]. No one answers when I ring. [*Calls through the door.*] Is anyone there? Please, will someone come up! [*A window, red with the glow of the fire, can be seen through the open door. The sound of a passing fire engine is heard.*] How awful it is! And I am so tired! [*Enter FERAPONT.*] Take this downstairs . . . give it to the Kolotilin girls, they're under the staircase . . . and this, too . . .

FERAPONT. Yes, miss. Moscow burnt down in 1812 too . . . Mercy on us! . . . Yes, the French were surprised all right.¹⁰

OLGA. Get along with you, take these things downstairs.

FERAPONT. Yes, miss. [*Goes out.*]

¹⁰ Napoleon occupied Moscow in September of 1812. On the night after his entry, the city was set on fire through carelessness. More than three-fourths of the houses burned, the citizens fled, and the city was plundered by the troops of both armies. The burning of Moscow became the signal, however, for the general rising of the peasants against the French. The event occupies an important place in Tolstoi's novel, *War and Peace*.

OLGA. Give them everything, Nurse dear. We don't need it, give it all away . . . I'm so tired, I can hardly stand up. We can't let the Vershinins go home. Let's see, the little girls can sleep in the drawing room, and Alexander Ignatyevich can go in with the Baron. Fedotik can too, or maybe he'd better sleep in the dining room. The Doctor's terribly drunk—you'd almost think he'd done it on purpose; he's so frightfully drunk we can't let anyone go into his room. And Vershinin's wife will have to go into the drawing room, too.

ANFISA [*wearily*]. Don't send me away, Olyushka, darling! Don't send me away!

OLGA. What kind of nonsense is that, Nurse! No one's going to send you away.

ANFISA [*leans her head against OLGA's breast*]. Oh, dearest! I do work, you know, I try as hard as I can . . . I suppose now that I can't do as much, they'll tell me to go. But where can I go? Where? I'm eighty years old, almost eight-two!

OLGA. Here, dear, you sit down for a bit . . . You're tired, poor thing . . . [*Makes her sit down.*] You just rest. How pale you look.

[*Enter NATASHA.*]

NATASHA. They're saying we ought to form a society to help the victims of the fire. Well, why not? It's a fine idea! We must always try to help the poor whenever we can. Bobik and Sofotchka are sound asleep as though nothing had happened. But I wish we didn't have such a crowd of people in the house. No matter where you turn, you bump into them. You know the flu's in town . . . and I'm so afraid the children may get it.

OLGA [*without listening to her*]. You can see the fire from the window, but it's quiet when the drapes are closed.

NATASHA. Yes . . . Oh, my hair must be all over the place. [*Stands in front of the mirror.*] They say I've gotten fat, but it's not true! I haven't added a pound. Masha's asleep . . . she's so tired, poor dear . . . [*Notices ANFISA, coldly.*] How dare you sit down in my presence? Get up! Get out of here! [*ANFISA goes out. A pause.*] I can't understand why you keep that old woman around here.

OLGA [*taken aback*]. Forgive my saying it, but I don't know how you . . .

NATASHA. She's useless. She's just a peasant and belongs in the country. Why do you pamper her like this? I like order in my house, and there's no room for useless people. [*Strokes OLGA's cheek.*] Poor dear, you're so tired! Our headmistress is tired! You know, when my Sofotchka grows up and goes to school, I'll be so afraid of you.

OLGA. I'm not going to be the headmistress.

NATASHA. You'll be elected, Olya. Why, it's all settled.

OLGA. I'll refuse. I couldn't do it . . . I haven't the strength for it. [*Drinks water.*] You were very rude to Nurse just now . . . You must forgive my saying it, but I just can't stand such inconsiderateness . . . I'm afraid I'm going to faint . . .

NATASHA [*agitated*]. Forgive me, Olya, forgive me. I didn't mean to upset you.

[*MASHA gets up, picks up a pillow and goes out angrily.*]

OLGA. Please try to understand . . . Perhaps we've been brought up in a

strange way, but I just can't stand it. When people are treated like that, it depresses me. It makes me ill . . . It completely upsets me.

NATASHA. Forgive me, dear, forgive me! . . . [*Kisses her.*]

OLGA. Any cruel or tactless remark, even when it's not intentional, upsets me . . .

NATASHA. I know I talk too much, I must be more careful—but you must admit, that she might just as well be out in the country.

OLGA. She's been with us for thirty years.

NATASHA. But she can't work any more, can she? Either I don't understand you, or you won't understand me. She can't work, she just sleeps and sits.

OLGA. Well, let her sit.

NATASHA [*in surprise*]. What do you mean, let her sit? She is a servant, you know! [*Tearfully.*] I just don't understand you, Olya! I have a nurse for the children and a wet nurse and we have a maid and a cook. What do we need that old woman for? What for?

[*The alarm is sounded again.*]

OLGA. I've grown ten years older tonight.

NATASHA. We must come to some sort of understanding, Olya. You're working at the school, and I'm working at home. You're teaching and I run the house. And if I say anything about the servants, I know what I'm talking about . . . That old thief, that old hag must get out of here tomorrow! . . . [*Stamps her feet.*] Do you understand! How dare you annoy me? How dare you? [*Recovering her self-control.*] Really, if you don't move downstairs, we'll always be quarrelling. It's terrible!

[*Enter KULYGIN.*]

KULYGIN. Where's Masha? It's time to go home. They say the fire's dying down. [*Stretches.*] Only one block burned, but at first it looked as if the whole town was going to be set on fire by the wind. [*Sits down.*] I'm so tired, Olya, my dear. You know, I've often thought that if I hadn't married Masha, I'd have married you, Olya. You're such a good person. I'm worn out. [*Listens.*]

OLGA. What's that?

KULYGIN. The Doctor's drunk just as if he'd done it on purpose. Drunk out of his mind . . . As if he'd done it on purpose. [*Gets up.*] I think he's coming up here . . . Hear him? Yes, here he comes. [*Laughs.*] What a man, really! . . . I'm going to hide. [*Goes to the wardrobe and stands between it and the wall.*] What a scoundrel!

OLGA. He hasn't had a drink for two years, and suddenly now he gets drunk. [*Goes with NATASHA behind one of the screens.*]

[*CHEBUTYKIN enters; without staggering, as if he were sober, he crosses the room, stops, looks around, then goes to the washstand and begins to wash his hands.*]

CHEBUTYKIN, [*glumly*]. The devil take them all . . . the whole lot of them! They think I can cure anything just because I'm a doctor, but I don't know anything . . . nothing at all. I've forgotten everything I ever knew. I don't remember anything, absolutely nothing . . . [*OLGA and NATASHA come out from behind the screen and leave the room without his noticing.*] The hell with them! Last Wednesday I treated a woman at Zasya. She died, and it's all my fault that she died. Yes . . . I knew something twenty-five years ago, but I don't remember anything now. Not a thing! Perhaps I'm not even a man at all,

but just imagine that I've got hands and feet and a head. Perhaps I don't exist at all, and I only imagine that I walk and eat and sleep. [*Weeps.*] Oh, if only I didn't exist! [*Stops crying, glumly.*] God knows . . . The other day they were talking about Shakespeare and Voltaire at the club . . . I hadn't read them, never read a single line, but I pretended that I had. The others did the same thing. How small we all are! How disgusting! And then all of a sudden I remembered that woman I killed on Wednesday. Everything came back to me, and I felt such a disgust, so sick of myself that I went and got drunk . . .

[*Enter IRINA, VERSHININ, and TUSENBACH. TUSENBACH is wearing a fashionable new civilian suit.*]

IRINA. Let's sit here. No one will come in here.

VERSHININ. The whole town would have burned if it hadn't been for the soldiers. They're a fine bunch of men! [*Rubs his hands with pleasure.*] Excellent men! Yes, a splendid group!

KULYGIN [*approaches them*]. What time is it?

TUSENBACH. It's after three. As a matter of fact, it's getting light.

IRINA. Everyone's sitting in the dining room and no one seems to think of going. That Solyony is there, too . . . [*To CHEBUTYKIN.*] You should be in bed, Doctor.

CHEBUTYKIN. I'm all right . . . Thanks . . . [*Combs his beard.*]

KULYGIN [*laughs*]. You're pretty far gone, Ivan Romanich! [*Slaps him on the shoulder.*] You're a fine one! "*In vino veritas*" as the Romans used to say.

TUSENBACH. I've been asked to arrange a benefit concert for the victims of the fire.

IRINA. But, who . . .

TUSENBACH. It could be arranged if we tried. In my opinion, Marya Sergeyevna plays the piano beautifully.

KULYGIN. Oh, yes, she does play very well.

IRINA. But she's forgotten how. It's been at least three, maybe four, years since she's played.

TUSENBACH. In this town nobody understands music, not a soul. But I, I do understand it—and believe me, Marya Sergeyevna plays magnificently, almost like a concert pianist.

KULYGIN. You're right, Baron. I'm very fond of Masha. She's such a nice girl.

TUSENBACH. Just imagine, being able to play so well, and to know all the time that there is no one to appreciate it—no one!

KULYGIN [*sighs*]. Yes . . . But would it be proper for her to take part in a concert? [*A pause.*] Of course, I know nothing about such matters. It may be quite all right. But you know, although our headmaster is a good man, a very fine man indeed, a most intelligent man, I know he has certain opinions . . . Of course, it's none of his business, but I'll ask him about it, just the same, if you like.

[*CHEBUTYKIN picks up a china clock and examines it.*]

VERSHININ. I've gotten my clothes all dirty helping with the fire, I must look terrible. [*A pause.*] They were saying yesterday that our brigade might be transferred to somewhere a long ways away from here. Some said to Poland, and others thought it would be to Northern Siberia, near Cheeta.

TUSENBACH. I heard that, too. The town will really be empty then.

IRINA. And we're going away, too!

CHEBUTYKIN [*drops the clock and breaks it*]. Smashed to smithereens!

[*A pause. Everyone looks upset and embarrassed.*]

KULYGIN [*picks up the pieces*]. Imagine breaking such a valuable thing! Ah, Ivan Romanich, Ivan Romanich! Black mark for conduct!

IRINA. It was mother's clock.

CHEBUTYKIN. Well, so it was. If it was your mother's clock, then it was your mother's. Perhaps I didn't break it but it just seems as though I did. Perhaps we only imagine that we exist, but we don't really exist at all. Perhaps I don't know anything, no one knows anything. [*Stops at the door.*] Why are you staring at me? Natasha's having a disgusting affair with Protopopov, and you don't see it. You sit here seeing nothing, and all the time Natasha's having a pleasant little affair with Protopopov . . . [*Sings.*] "Won't you accept this little present from me?" . . . Strange. [*Goes out.*]

VERSHININ. So . . . [*Laughs.*] How strange it all is, really! [*A pause.*] When the fire started, I ran home as fast as I could. When I got to the house, I saw that it was all right and out of danger, but my two little girls were standing in the doorway in their pajamas. Their mother was gone. People were rushing about, horses, dogs, and in the children's faces I saw terror and anxiety, the most helpless look, I don't know what! . . . When I saw their faces, my heart sank. My God, I thought, what will these children have to go through for the rest of their lives? I grabbed them and ran back here, and all the time I kept thinking one thing: What else will they have to live through? [*The alarm is sounded. A pause.*] When I got here, my wife was already here . . . shouting and angry. [*Enter MASHA carrying a pillow.*] And while my little girls were standing there in the doorway with nothing on but their pajamas, and the street was red with the fire and full of terrible noises, I suddenly realized that this is what it must have been like years ago, when armies used to make sudden raids, plundering and burning . . . Anyway, is there really any difference between things as they used to be and the way they are now? And you know, it won't be very long, say another two or three hundred years, before people will look at our way of life with horror and scorn, just as we look at the past now. Everything about our life will seem uncouth to them, boring and awkward and strange . . . Oh, what a great life that will be! What a life! [*Laughs.*] Forgive me I'm philosophizing again . . . but may I go on, please? I have a great desire to talk about the future. [*A pause.*] It looks like everyone's gone to sleep. As I was saying: How wonderful life will be then! Just imagine . . . Today there are only three people like you in this town, but in the future there will be more and more people like you. At last the time will come when everything will be just as you'd want it to be. People will begin to live their lives in your way, in fact, they may even make improvements, and a new group will emerge even better than you are . . . [*Laughs.*] I'm in a very strange mood today. I have such a tremendous longing for life . . . [*Sings.*] "To Love all ages are in fee, The passion's good for you and me" . . . [*Laughs.*]

MASHA [*sings*]. Tara-ta-tum . . .

VERSHININ. Tum-tum . . .

MASHA. Tara-tara-tara . . .

VERSHININ. Tum-tum, tum-tum . . . [*Laughs.*]

[Enter FEDOTIK.]

FEDOTIK [*dancing about*]. Burnt, burnt to the ground! Everything I had in the world—burnt!

[All laugh.]

IRINA. What kind of joke is that? Is everything gone?

FEDOTIK [*laughs*]. Everything. Nothing's left. My guitar, my camera, all my letters, why even the little notebook I was going to give you has been burnt.

[Enter SOLYONY.]

IRINA. No, please go away, Vassily Vassilyevich. You can't come in here.

SOLYONY. Can't I? But why can the Baron come in here if I can't?

VERSHININ. We've really got to go, all of us. How's the fire?

SOLYONY. They say it's dying down. But I can't understand why the Baron can come in here, and I can't. [*Takes a scent bottle from his pocket and sprinkles himself with scent.*]

VERSHININ. Tara-tara.

MASHA. Tum-tum, tum-tum.

VERSHININ [*laughs; to SOLYONY*]. Let's go into the dining room.

SOLYONY. Very well, but I'll make a note of it. "I hardly need to make my moral clear: That might be teasing geese, I fear!" [*Looks at TUSENBACH*]. Cluck, cluck, cluck! [*Goes out with VERSHININ and FEDOTIK.*]

IRINA. That Solyony has filled the room with smoke . . . [*Puzzled.*] The Baron's asleep. Baron! Baron!

TUSENBACH [*waking out of his doze*]. I must be tired. The brickyard, and . . . No, I'm not talking in my sleep. I really am going to the brickyard and will start working there soon . . . I've talked to the manager. [*To IRINA, tenderly.*] You are so pale, so beautiful, so bewitching . . . It seems to me your paleness brightens the darkness around you like light, somehow . . . You're sad, you're dissatisfied with life . . . Oh, come away with me, we can work together!

MASHA. Nikolai Lvovich, I wish you'd go away.

TUSENBACH [*laughs*]. Are you here? I didn't see you. [*Kisses IRINA's hand.*] Good-bye, I'm going. You know, as I look at you now, I keep thinking of the day—it seems like such a long time ago on your birthday—when you talked about the joy of work . . . You were so gay and confident then . . . And what a happy life I imagined for us! Where is it all now? [*Kisses her hand.*] There are tears in your eyes. Go to bed, it's getting light . . . it's almost morning . . . Oh, if only I could give my life for you!

MASHA. Nikolai Lvovich, please leave! Really now . . .

TUSENBACH. I'm going [*Goes out.*]

MASHA [*lies down*]. Are you asleep, Fyodor?

KULYGIN. Eh?

MASHA. Why don't you go home?

KULYGIN. My darling Masha, my dear Masha . . .

IRINA. She's tired. Let her rest awhile, Fedya.

KULYGIN. I'll go in a minute. My wife, my dear, good wife! How I love you! . . . Only you!

MASHA [*crossly*]. "*Amo, amas, amat, amamus, amatis, amant!*"¹¹

KULYGIN [*laughs*]. Really, what an amazing woman she is!—I've been

¹¹ Conjugation of the Latin verb *amare*, "to love."

married to you for seven years, but it seems as if we were married only yesterday. Honest, it does! You really are wonderful! Oh, I'm so happy, happy, happy!

MASHA. And I'm so bored, bored, bored! [*Sits up.*] I can't get it out of my head . . . It's so annoying. It sticks in my head like a nail . . . I've just got to say something. It's about Andrey . . . He's actually mortgaged the house to the bank, and his wife's taken all the money—but the house doesn't belong to him, but to the four of us! He must know that, if he has any decency at all.

KULYGIN. Why talk about it, Masha? Why think of it now? Andriusha owes money to everyone . . . Let him alone.

MASHA. Anyway, it's revolting. [*Lies down.*]

KULYGIN. At any rate, we aren't poor, Masha. I've got work, I teach at the high school, and I tutor in my spare time . . . I'm just a simple, honest man . . . "*Omnia mea mecum porto*,"¹² as they say.

MASHA. I'm not asking for anything, I just don't like the injustice. [*A pause.*] Why don't you go home, Fyodor?

KULYGIN [*kisses her*]. You're tired. Just rest here for a while . . . I'll wait for you . . . Go to sleep. [*Goes to the door.*] I'm happy, happy, happy! [*Goes out.*]

IRINA. As a matter of fact, Andrey has become awfully dull. He's getting old and since he's been living with that woman he's lost all his ambition! He used to work for his professorship and just yesterday he was buzzing about getting elected to the County Council. Imagine him a member, with Protopopov as chairman! The whole town's laughing at him, and he's the only one who doesn't know or see anything. Here everyone's rushing off to the fire and he just sits in his study playing his violin. He hasn't even noticed it. [*Agitated.*] Oh, it's awful, just awful, awful! I can't take it any more, I can't, I really can't! . . .

[*Enter OLGA. She starts arranging things on her bedside table.*]

IRINA [*sobs loudly*]. Turn me out! You must turn me out of here! I can't stand it any more!

OLGA [*alarmed*]. What is it? What is it, my darling?

IRINA [*sobbing*]. Where . . . Where has it all gone? Where is it? Oh, God! I've forgotten . . . I've forgotten everything . . . Everything's so confused . . . I don't remember the Italian for "window" or for "ceiling" . . . Every day I'm forgetting more and more, and life's slipping by, and it will never, never return . . . We'll never go to Moscow . . . I just know we'll never go . . .

OLGA. Don't, dear, don't . . .

IRINA [*trying to control herself*]. I'm miserable. [*Pause.*] I've had enough, enough. I can't, I won't, I will not work! . . . First I worked at the post office, now I'm a secretary at the Council office, and I hate and despise it all. I'm nearly twenty-four, and all I've done is work, my brain's drying up. I know I'm getting thinner and uglier and older, and there's nothing, nothing I can look forward to, no satisfaction in life that I can hope for, none at all. Time is flying past . . . and I feel as if I'm moving from any hope of a genuine fine life, and I seem to be getting further and further away from real life, from a life that is beautiful. I feel that I am heading for some horrible disaster. I'm in

¹² (Latin) I carry all my possessions with me. (The philosopher's proverbial scorn of material possessions.)

despair and I don't know why I go on living, why I haven't killed myself . . .

OLGA. Don't cry, my child, don't cry . . .

IRINA. I'm not crying—I'm not crying. I've stopped now, see? I'm not crying any more. I've stopped. I've stopped . . .

OLGA. Darling, let me tell you something . . . as your sister, as your friend . . . if you'll take my advice . . . you'll marry the Baron. [IRINA weeps quietly.] You do respect him don't you? You think highly of him . . . It's true, he's not handsome, but he's such an honest, decent man . . . After all, people don't marry for love, but to fulfill their duty. At least, I think so, and I'd marry even if I weren't in love. I'd marry anyone that proposed to me, as long as he was a decent man. I'd even marry an old man.

IRINA. I've been waiting all this time, expecting that we'd be moving to Moscow, and that there I'd meet the man I'm meant for. I've dreamt about him and I've loved him in my dreams . . . But it's all turned out to be nothing . . . nothing . . .

OLGA [*embracing her*]. My darling sister, I think I understand everything. When the Baron resigned his commission and came to see us dressed in his civilian clothes, I thought he looked so ugly that I actually started to cry . . . He asked me why I was crying . . . How could I tell him? But, if it were God's will that he should marry you, I'd be happy about it. That's a different thing, you know, quite different!

[NATASHA, carrying a candle, comes out of the door on the right, crosses the stage and goes out through the door on the left without saying anything.]

MASHA [*sits up*]. She walks around looking as if she'd set the town on fire herself.

OLGA. You're silly, Masha. You're the silliest person in our family. You must forgive me for saying it. [*A pause.*]

MASHA. My dear sisters, I've got something to confess to you. I have to tell someone, I need to . . . I'll confess it to the two of you, and then never again, never to anybody! NO! Right now. [*In a low voice.*] It's a secret, but you must know everything. I can't keep silent any longer. [*A pause.*] I'm in love, in love . . . I love that man . . . You just saw him . . . Oh, what's the use? . . . I love Vershinin . . .

OLGA [*goes behind her screen*]. Don't say it. I don't want to hear it.

MASHA. But, what am I to do? [*Holding her head.*] At first I thought him very strange, then I felt sorry for him and—and then I fell in love with him . . . love everything about him—his voice, his words, his troubles, his two little girls . . .

OLGA. I don't want to hear it. You can talk as much nonsense as you like, I'm not listening.

MASHA. Don't be silly, Olya! If I love him, well—that's my fate! That's my destiny. And he loves me. It's frightening, isn't it? Is it wrong? [*Takes IRINA by the hand and draws her to her.*] Oh, my darling! . . . How are we going to live through the rest of our lives? What's to become of us? When you read a novel, everything in it seems too trite and obvious. It's so understandable—but when you fall in love yourself, you suddenly discover that no one really knows anything, and you've got to make your own choices . . . My dear sisters, my dear sisters! . . . I've confessed to you, and now I'll be silent . . . Like Gogol's madman—silence . . . silence! . . .

[Enter ANDREY followed by FERAPONT.]

ANDREY [crossly]. What do you want? I don't understand.

FERAPONT [stopping in the doorway, impatiently]. I've told you ten times already, Andrey Sergeyevitch.

ANDREY. In the first place, I'm not Andrey Sergeyevitch—you're to call me "Your Honor."

FERAPONT. Your Honor, the firemen want to go through the garden to go to the river. They've been taking the long way round and it's been a terrible nuisance!

ANDREY. All right. Tell them it's all right. [FERAPONT goes out.] Why do they keep on bothering me? Where's Olga? [OLGA comes from behind the screen.] I've come to get the key to the cupboard; I've lost mine. You know the one I mean, the little one . . .

[OLGA silently hands him the key. IRINA goes behind the screen on her side of the room.]

ANDREY. What a wonderful fire! It's dying down though. Ferapont made me lose my temper, damn him! That was stupid of me . . . Telling him to call me "Your Honor"! . . . [A pause.] Why don't you say something, Olya? [A pause.] Let's stop this foolishness . . . There's no reason to sulk . . . You here, Masha? And Irina, too. Good! Let's have it out once and for all. What have you got against me? What is it?

OLGA. Forget it for now, Andriusha. We'll talk about it tomorrow. [Agitated.] What a horrible night!

ANDREY [in great embarrassment]. Don't get upset. I'm asking you calmly, what have you got against me? Tell me frankly.

VERSHININ'S VOICE [off-stage]. Tum-tum-tum!

MASHA [in a loud voice, getting up]. Tara-tara-tara! [To OLGA.] Good-night, Olya, God bless you! [Goes behind the screen and kisses IRINA.] Sleep well . . . Good night, Andrey. I'd go away now, they're tired . . . talk about it tomorrow . . . [Goes out.]

OLGA. Yes, really, Andriusha, let's wait until tomorrow . . . [Goes behind the screen on her side of the room.] It's time we were in bed.

ANDREY. I only want to say one thing, then I'll go, as soon as . . . First of all, you've got something against my wife, against Natasha. I've noticed it from the day we got married. Natasha is a very fine woman, she's honest and straightforward and . . . that's my opinion. I love and respect my wife. Do you understand? I respect her, and I expect others to respect her, too. I repeat; she's an honest, honorable person, and all your complaints against her—and I must say this—are all in your imagination, and nothing more . . . [A pause.] Second, you seem disappointed in me for not being a professor, because I've stopped studying. But I'm working, I'm a member of the Council, and I feel my work there is just as important as any academic work I might do. I'm a member of the Council, and if you want to know, I'm proud of it! [A pause.] Third . . . there's something else I must tell you . . . I know I mortgaged the house without asking your permission . . . That was wrong, I admit it, and I ask you to forgive me . . . I had to because of my debts . . . thirty-five thousand roubles, but I don't gamble any more, I gave that up long ago . . . The only thing I can say in my defense, is that all of you get an annuity, while I don't get anything . . . no salary, I mean . . . [A pause.]

KULYGIN [*calling through the door*]. Is Masha there? She's not? [*Alarmed.*] Where can she be then? That's strange . . . [*Goes away.*]

ANDREY. So you won't listen? Natasha, I tell you, is a fine, honest woman. [*Walks up and down the stage, then stops.*] When we got married I was sure we'd be happy, all of us . . . But . . . Oh, my God! . . . [*Weeps.*] My dear sisters, my dear, good sisters, don't believe what I've been saying, don't believe it . . . [*Goes out.*]

KULYGIN [*through the door, agitated*]. Where's Masha? Isn't Masha here? How strange. [*Goes away.*]

[*The alarm is heard again. The stage is empty.*]

IRINA [*speaking from behind the screen*]. Olya! Who's that knocking on the floor?

OLGA. It's the Doctor, Ivan Romanich. He's drunk.

IRINA. It's been one catastrophe after another all night. [*A pause.*] Olya! [*Peeps out from behind the screen.*] Have you heard? The brigade is leaving . . . they're being transferred to some place far away.

OLGA. That's only a rumor.

IRINA. Then we shall be alone . . . Olya!

OLGA. Well?

IRINA. Olya, darling, I respect the Baron . . . I think a great deal of him, he's a very good man . . . I'll marry him, Olya, I'll agree to marry him, if only we can go to Moscow! Let's go, please let's go! There's no place in the world like Moscow. Let's go, Olya! Let's go!

Curtain.

ACT IV

An old garden in front of the PROZOROV'S house. A river is seen at the end of a long avenue of fir trees, and on the other side of the river a forest. To the right, a terrace with a table on which champagne bottles and glasses have been left. It is noon. Occasionally people from the street pass through the garden to get to the river. Five or six soldiers march through quickly. CHEBUTYKIN, in an affable mood which does not leave him throughout the act, is sitting in a chair in the garden waiting to be called. He is wearing his army cap and is holding a walking stick. KULYGIN, with a decoration round his neck and with his moustache shaved off, TUSENBACH and IRINA are standing on the terrace saying good-bye to FEDOTIK and RODÉ, who are coming down the steps. Both officers are in dress uniform.

TUSENBACH [*embracing FEDOTIK*]. You're a fine fellow, Fedotik; we've been good friends! [*Embraces RODÉ*] Once more, then . . . Good-bye, my friends!

IRINA. Au revoir!

FEDOTIK. No, it's not au revoir—It's good-bye. We'll never meet again!

KULYGIN. Who knows? [*Wipes his eyes, smiling.*] There, I'm beginning to cry, too.

IRINA. We'll meet some day.

FEDOTIK. In ten or fifteen years maybe. But by then we'll hardly know

each other . . . We'll just meet and say very coldly, "How are you?" [*Takes a picture.*] Stand still . . . Just one more, for the last time.

RODÉ [*embraces TUSENBACH*]. We probably won't meet again . . . [*Kisses IRINA's hand.*] Thank you for everything . . . everything!

FEDOTIK [*annoyed*]. Just wait a second!

TUSENBACH. I hope we do, and we will meet again if it's our fate. But write to us. Be sure to write.

RODÉ [*glancing around the garden*]. Good-bye, trees! [*Shouts.*] Halloo! [*A pause.*] Good-bye, echo!

KULYGIN. It wouldn't surprise me if you got married in Poland . . . You'll get some Polish wife, and she'll put her arms around you and say: "Kohane"¹³ [*Laughs.*]

FEDOTIK [*glances at his watch*]. We leave in less than an hour. Solyony is the only one from the battery who's going on the barge. Everyone else is marching with the division. Three batteries are leaving today and the other three tomorrow—then the town will have peace and quiet.

TUSENBACH. Yes, and dreadful boredom, too.

RODÉ. By the way, where's Marya Sergeyevna?

KULYGIN. She's somewhere in the garden.

FEDOTIK. We must say good-bye to her.

RODÉ. Good-bye. I really must go, or I'll start crying. [*Quickly embraces TUSENBACH and KULYGIN, kisses IRINA's hand.*] We've had a wonderful time here . . .

FEDOTIK [*to KULYGIN*]. Here's a souvenir for you—a notebook and pencil . . . We'll go down to the river this way. [*They go off, glancing back.*]

RODÉ [*shouts*]. Halloo!

KULYGIN [*shouts*]. Good-bye!

[*At the back of the stage FEDOTIK and RODÉ meet MASHA, and say good-bye to her; she goes off with them.*]

IRINA. They've gone . . . [*Sits down on the bottom step of the terrace.*]

CHEBUTYKIN. They forgot to say good-bye to me.

IRINA. Well, what about you?

CHEBUTYKIN. That's true, I forgot, too. Oh well, I'll be seeing them again soon. I leave tomorrow. Yes . . . only one more day. And then, in a year I'll retire. I'll come back and spend the rest of my life with you. Just one more year and then I get my pension . . . [*Puts a newspaper in his pocket and takes out another.*] I'll come back here and lead a reformed life. I'll become a nice, quiet, respectable little man.

IRINA. Yes, it's about time you reformed, Ivan Romanich. You ought to lead a better kind of life.

CHEBUTYKIN. Yes . . . I think so, too. [*Sings quietly.*] "Tarara-boom-di-ay . . . I'm sitting on a tomb-di-ay" . . .

KULYGIN. You're incorrigible, Ivan Romanich! Absolutely incorrigible!

CHEBUTYKIN. Yes, if only you had taken me in hand. You'd have reformed me!

IRINA. Fyodor's shaved his moustache off. I can't bear to look at him.

KULYGIN. Why not?

¹³ (Polish) Love!

CHEBUTYKIN. If I could only tell you what your face looks like now—but I'd better not.

KULYGIN. Well! It's the fashion now! The "*modus vivendi*," you know. The headmaster shaved his moustache off, so when I became the principal, I shaved mine off, too. No one likes it, but I don't care. I'm content. Whether I've got a moustache or not, it's all the same to me. [*Sits down.*]

[ANDREY passes across the back of the stage pushing a baby carriage with a child asleep in it.]

IRINA. Ivan Romanich, my dear friend, I'm terribly worried about something. You were in town last night—tell me what happened?

CHEBUTYKIN. What happened? Nothing. Just a trifle. [*Reads his paper.*] It doesn't matter anyway.

KULYGIN. They say that Solyony and the Baron met outside the theatre last night and . . .

TUSENBACH. Stop it, please! What's the good? . . . [*Waves his hand at him deprecatingly and goes into the house.*]

KULYGIN. It was outside the theatre . . . Solyony started insulting the Baron, and the Baron lost his temper and insulted him.

CHEBUTYKIN. I don't know anything about it. It's all nonsense.

KULYGIN. A teacher once wrote "nonsense" on one of his student's papers, and the student couldn't figure it out. He thought it was a Latin word. [*Laughs.*] Isn't that funny? They say that Solyony's in love with Irina and that he hates the Baron . . . Well, that's understandable. Irina's a very sweet girl. She's a lot like Masha, all wrapped up in her own thoughts. [*To IRINA.*] But you have a gentler disposition than Masha. And yet Masha has a very pleasant disposition, too. I love my Masha, I love her.

[*From the back of the stage comes a shout: "Halloo!"*]

IRINA [*starts*]. Everything seems to frighten me today. [*A pause.*] Well, all my things are ready. I'm sending the luggage off after lunch. The Baron and I are going to get married tomorrow, and then we're moving to the brickyard, and the next day I begin work at the school. So, God willing, our new life will begin. When I passed my exams, I felt so happy that I cried with a feeling of pure bliss . . . [*A pause.*] They will be coming for my things in a minute . . .

KULYGIN. That's all very well, but it doesn't seem serious. Nothing but ideas and theories, nothing really serious. Anyway, I wish you the best of luck.

CHEBUTYKIN [*moved*]. My precious little girl, my dear child! You've gone on so far ahead of me, I'll never catch up with you now. I've been left behind like a bird that's too old and can't keep up with the rest of the flock. Fly away, my dear, fly away, and God bless you! [*A pause.*] It's a shame you've shaved your moustache off, Fyodor Ilyich.

KULYGIN. Don't keep that up, please. [*Sighs.*] Well, the soldiers are leaving today, and then everything will be as it used to. I don't care what they say, Masha is a fine, loyal wife and I love her very much and I'm grateful for what God has given me. Fate treats people so differently. For instance, there's a clerk in the tax office called Kozyrev. We went to school together and he was expelled in his fifth year because he just couldn't understand the "*ut consecutivum*."¹⁴ He's terribly poor now; and in bad health, too, and whenever I meet

¹⁴ (Latin) And consequently. (An allusion to the simple "cause and effect" reasoning frequently inculcated in schools.)

him, I say to him: "Hello, '*ut consecutivum*!'" "Yes," he says, "that's just the trouble—'*consecutivum*'" . . . and he begins to cough. And here I am—I've always been successful. I'm happy. Why, I've even been awarded the order of Saint Stanislav, second class—and now I'm teaching the students the same old "*ut consecutivum*." Of course, I'm clever, cleverer than most people, but happiness doesn't consist of being clever . . .

[*In the house someone plays "The Maiden's Prayer" on the piano.*]

IRINA. After tomorrow I won't have to listen to "The Maiden's Prayer." I won't have to meet Protopopov. . . . [*A pause.*] By the way, he's in the drawing room. He's here again today.

KULYGIN. Hasn't the headmistress come yet?

IRINA. No, we've sent for her. If you only knew how hard it's been for me to live here by myself, without Olya! Now that she's the headmistress and lives at school and is busy all day long and I'm here alone, I'm bored, I've nothing to do, and I hate the room I live in. So I've decided that if I'm not going to live in Moscow, then it just can't be helped. It's my fate and there's nothing to be done about it. It's God's will, everything that happens, there's no doubt about it. Nikolai Lvovich proposed to me . . . Well, I thought it over, and I just decided. He's a good man, it's really amazing how kind he is . . . And then suddenly I felt as though my soul had grown wings. I was more cheerful and I longed to work again. To work! . . . Except something happened yesterday, and now there's a mystery hanging over me . . .

CHEBUTYKIN. Nonsense!

NATASHA [*speaking through the window*]. Our headmistress!

KULYGIN. Our headmistress has come! Let's go in. [*Goes indoors with IRINA.*]

CHEBUTYKIN [*reads his paper and sings quietly to himself*]. "Tarara-boom-di-ay . . . I'm sitting on a tomb-di-ay . . ."

[*MASHA walks up to him; ANDREY passes across the back of the stage pushing the baby carriage.*]

MASHA. You look comfortable . . .

CHEBUTYKIN. Well, why not? Anything happening?

MASHA [*sits down*]. No, nothing. [*A pause.*] Tell me something. Were you in love with my mother?

CHEBUTYKIN. Yes, very much in love.

MASHA. Did she love you?

CHEBUTYKIN [*after a pause*]. I can't remember any more.

MASHA. Is my man here? Our cook Marfa always used to call her policeman "my man." Is he here?

CHEBUTYKIN. Not yet.

MASHA. When you have to take your happiness in bits and snatches, and then you lose it, as I have, you can't help but get hardened and bitter. [*Points at her breast.*] I'm seething inside as if I'll boil over. [*Looking at ANDREY, who again crosses the stage with the carriage.*] And there's our Andrey . . . All our hopes are shattered. It's the same as when thousands of men raise a huge bell up into a tower. A lot of work and money is spent on it, and then suddenly it falls and gets smashed. Suddenly, for no reason at all. That is Andrey . . .

ANDREY. When will they be quiet in the house? There is so much noise.

CHEBUTYKIN. Soon. [*Looks at his watch.*] You know, this is a very old

watch: it strikes . . . [*Winds his watch, which then strikes.*] The first, second and fifth batteries are going at one o'clock. [*A pause.*] And I am going tomorrow.

ANDREY. For good?

CHEBUTYKIN. I don't know. Perhaps I'll come back next year. Although, God knows . . . it doesn't matter one way or the other.

[*The sounds of a harp and a violin are heard.*]

ANDREY. The town will be empty. Just as if life were snuffed out like a candle. [*A pause.*] Something happened yesterday at the theatre; everybody's talking about it. But I don't know anything about it.

CHEBUTYKIN. It was nothing. Just a lot of nonsense. Solyony started bothering the Baron again, and the Baron lost his temper and insulted him, and so Solyony had to challenge him to a duel. [*Looks at his watch.*] It's about time to go . . . At half-past twelve, in the forest, on the other side of the river . . . Bang-bang! [*Laughs.*] Solyony thinks he's Lermontov. Why he even writes poetry. But, all kidding aside, this is his third duel.

MASHA. Whose?

CHEBUTYKIN. Solyony's.

MASHA. What about the Baron?

CHEBUTYKIN. Well, what about him? [*A pause.*]

MASHA. My thoughts are all confused. Anyway you shouldn't let them fight. He might wound the Baron or even kill him.

CHEBUTYKIN. The Baron's a fine man, but what does it really matter if there's one Baron more or less in the world? What difference does it make? [*The shouts of "Yoo-hoo!" and "Halloo!" are heard from beyond the garden.*] That's Skvortsov, the second, shouting from the boat. Let him wait.

ANDREY. Frankly, I think it's downright immoral to fight a duel, or even to be present at one as a doctor.

CHEBUTYKIN. It only seems that way . . . We don't really exist, nothing does, we only think so . . . And anyway, what difference does it make?

MASHA. Talk, talk, talk, nothing but talk all day long! . . . [*Starts to go.*] To have to live in this terrible climate with the snow threatening to fall all the time, and then to have to listen to all this talk . . . [*Stops.*] I'm not going into the house, I can't stand going in there . . . Will you let me know when Vershinin comes? . . . [*Walks off along the avenue.*] Look, the birds are beginning to fly away already! [*Looks up.*] Swans or geese . . . Lovely birds, happy birds . . . [*Goes off.*]

ANDREY. The house will seem awfully empty. The officers are leaving, you're going, my sister's getting married, and I'll be left alone in the house.

CHEBUTYKIN. What about your wife?

[*Enter FERAPONT with some papers.*]

ANDREY. My wife is my wife. She's a good, decent woman . . . and she's really very kind, but there's something about her that reduces her to the level of some petty, blind, hairy animal. Anyway, she's not a human being. I'm telling you this as a friend, the only person I can really talk to. I do love Natasha, but sometimes she seems so completely vulgar, that I don't know what to think, and then I can't understand why I love her—or, why I ever did love her . . .

CHEBUTYKIN [*gets up*]. Well, my boy, I'm leaving tomorrow and I might never see you again. So I'll give you a piece of advice. Put on your hat, take a

walking stick, and go away . . . Go away, and don't ever look back. And the further you go, the better. [*Pause.*] But do as you like! What difference does it make?

[SOLYONY *passes across the back of the stage accompanied by two officers. Seeing CHEBUTYKIN, he turns towards him, while the officers walk on.*]

SOLYONY. It's time, Doctor. Twelve-thirty already. [*Shakes hands with ANDREY.*]

CHEBUTYKIN. Just a minute. Oh, I'm so sick of you all. [*To ANDREY.*] Andriusha, if anyone asks for me, tell them I'll be back. [*Sighs.*] Oh-ho-ho!

SOLYONY. "He had hardly time to catch his breath / Before the bear was hugging him to death." [*Walks off with him.*] What are you grumbling about, old man?

CHEBUTYKIN. Oh, well!

SOLYONY. How do you feel?

CHEBUTYKIN [*crossly*]. Fit as a fiddle.

SOLYONY. There's nothing to be so upset about, old man. I shan't go too far, I'll just touch his wings a little, like a snipe. [*Takes out a perfume bottle and sprinkles perfume over his hands.*] I've used up a whole bottle today, but my hands still smell . . . like a corpse. [*A pause.*] By the way . . . Do you remember that poem of Lermontov's "And he, rebellious, seeks a storm, / As if in storm there were tranquility" . . .

CHEBUTYKIN. Yes. "He had hardly time to catch his breath / Before the bear was hugging him to death." [*Goes out with SOLYONY.*]

[*Shouts of "Halloo! Yoo-hoo!" are heard.*]

FERAPONT. Will you sign these, please?

ANDREY [*with irritation*]. Let me alone. Let me alone, please. [*Goes off with the carriage.*]

FERAPONT. That's what papers are for—to be signed. [*Goes to back of stage.*]

[*Enter IRINA and TUSENBACH, wearing a straw hat. KULYGIN crosses the stage, calling: "Yoo-hoo! Masha! Yoo-hoo!"*]

TUSENBACH. He's probably the only person in town who's glad the officers are leaving.

IRINA. That's understandable, I guess. [*A pause.*] The town will be quite empty now.

TUSENBACH. Darling, I'll be back in just a minute.

IRINA. Where are you going?

TUSENBACH. I've got to go to town, and then . . . I want to see some of my comrades off.

IRINA. It's not true . . . Nikolai, why are you so absent-minded today? [*A pause.*] What happened last night at the theatre?

TUSENBACH [*with a gesture of impatience*]. I'll be back in an hour . . . back with you again. [*Kisses her hands.*] My beautiful one . . . [*Gazes into her eyes.*] I've loved you now for five years and still I can't get used to it. You seem more beautiful every day. What marvelous, lovely hair! What wonderful eyes! I'll take you away tomorrow. We'll work, we'll be rich and my dreams will come true. And you'll be happy! But—there's only one thing, only one—you don't love me!

IRINA. I can't help that! I'll be your wife, I'll be faithful and loyal to you,

but I can't love you . . . We can't do anything about it. [*Weeps.*] I've never really loved anyone in my life. Oh, I've dreamt about being in love! I've been dreaming about it for years and years, day and night . . . but somehow my soul is like an expensive grand piano that someone has locked and the key's been lost. [*A pause.*] What's wrong?

TUSENBACH. I didn't sleep last night. Not that there's anything I'm afraid of. It's just that the thought of that lost key torments me and I can't sleep. Say something to me . . . [*A pause.*] Say something!

IRINA. What? What am I to say? What?

TUSENBACH. Anything.

IRINA. —Don't, my dear, don't, please . . . [*A pause.*]

TUSENBACH. It's strange how little things—trifles sometimes become so important in our lives, for no reason at all. You laugh at them, just as you always have done, you still regard them as trifles, and yet you suddenly find they're controlling you, and you haven't the power to stop them. But let's not talk about that! Really, I feel fine. I feel as if I were seeing those pine trees and maples and birches for the first time in my life. They all seem to be looking at me, waiting for something. What beautiful trees—and when you think of it, how beautiful life ought to be when there are trees like these! [*Shouts of "Halloo!" are heard.*] I've got to go . . . Look at that tree, it's dead, but it goes on swaying in the wind with the others. And it seems to me that in the same way, if I die, I'll still have a part in life, one way or another. Good-bye, my darling . . . [*Kisses her hands.*] The papers you gave me are on my desk, under the calendar.

IRINA. I'm coming with you.

TUSENBACH [*alarmed*]. No, no! [*Goes off quickly, then stops in the avenue.*] Irina!

IRINA. What?

TUSENBACH [*not knowing what to say*]. I didn't have any coffee this morning. Will you tell them to make me some? [*Goes off quickly.*]

[*IRINA stands, lost in thought, then goes to the back of the stage and sits down on a swing. Enter ANDREY with the carriage; FERAPONT appears.*]

FERAPONT. Andrey Sergeyevich, the papers aren't mine, you know; they're official. I didn't invent them.

ANDREY. Oh, where has it gone?—What's become of my past when I was young and gay and clever, when I had beautiful dreams and was full of ideas, and the present and the future were bright with hope? Why do you become so dull, so ordinary, so uninteresting almost before we've begun to live? . . . This town's been here for two hundred years; a hundred thousand people live in it, but we're all the same! There's never been a scholar or an artist or a saint in this place, not one man remarkable enough to make you feel envy or want to imitate him. They only eat, drink and sleep . . . Then they die and others take their places, and they eat, drink and sleep, too—and as if for variety, just to avoid being bored to death, they gossip, drink vodka, gamble and cheat. The wives deceive their husbands, and the husbands lie to their wives, and pretend they don't see or hear anything . . . And it's this overwhelming vulgarity that crushes our children and destroys any talent they might have, so that they become miserable and more dead than alive, all alike and just like their parents . . . [*To FERAPONT, crossly.*] What do you want?

FERAPONT. What? Here are the papers to sign.

ANDREY. What a nuisance you are!

FERAPONT [*hands him the papers*]. The janitor at the tax office was saying that last winter they had two hundred degrees of frost in Petersburg.

ANDREY. I hate my life as I am living it now, but oh! the sense of elation when I think of the future! Then I feel so light-hearted, have such a sense of release! I seem to see a bright light in the distance, light and freedom. I'll be free, and my children, too,—free from idleness, free from kvass, free from those meals of goose and cabbage, from after-dinner naps, and from all this degrading parasitism! . . .

FERAPONT. And he said two thousand people were frozen to death and that everyone was frightened to death. It was either in Petersburg or in Moscow, I don't remember for sure.

ANDREY [*with sudden emotion, tenderly*]. My dear sisters, my wonderful sisters! [*Tearfully.*] Masha, my dear sister! . . .

NATASHA [*through the window*]. Who's talking so loudly out there? Is that you, Andryusha? You'll wake Sofotchka. "*Il ne faut pas faire du bruit, la Sophie est dormie déjà. Vous êtes un ours.*"¹⁵ [*Getting angry.*] If you want to talk, give the carriage to someone else. Ferapont, take the carriage from the master.

FERAPONT. Yes, Ma'am. [*Takes the carriage.*]

ANDREY [*embarrassed*]. I was talking quietly.

NATASHA [*in the window, caressing her small son*]. Bobik! Naughty Bobik! You naughty boy, you!

ANDREY [*glancing through the papers*]. All right, I'll go through these. You can take them back to the office later. [*Goes into the house, reading the papers.*]

[*FERAPONT wheels the carriage into the garden.*]

NATASHA [*in the window*]. What's Mommy's name, Bobik? You little angel! And who's that? Auntie Olya. Say: "Hello, Auntie Olya."

[*Two wandering musicians, a man and a girl, enter and play a violin and a harp. VERSHININ, OLGA, and ANFISA come out of the house and listen in silence for a few moments; then IRINA approaches them.*]

OLGA. Our garden's like a city park; everybody goes through it. Nurse, give this to the musicians.

ANFISA [*giving them money*]. Get along with you and God bless you! Poor souls! [*The musicians bow and go away. To IRINA.*] How are you, Irinushka? [*Kisses her.*] Ah, my child, what a time I'm having! Living in a big apartment at the school with Olyushka—and no rent to pay, either! The Lord's been good to me in my old age. I've never lived so well in my life, old sinner that I am! A big apartment, and a whole room to myself with my own bed, and no rent to pay. When I wake up in the night, why then—Oh, Lord! Oh, Holy Mother of God! I'm the happiest person in the world!

VERSHININ [*glances at his watch*]. They'll be leaving soon, Olga Sergeyevna. It's time I left, too. [*A pause.*] I wish you all the happiness in the world . . . only the best . . . Where's Marya Sergeyevna?

IRINA. She's somewhere in the garden. I'll go and look for her.

¹⁵ (French) You must not make any noise; Sophie is already asleep. You're a bear!

VERSHININ. Would you please? I've really got to hurry.

ANFISA. I'll come and help you. [*Calls out.*] Mashenka, yoo-hoo, yoo-hoo!

VERSHININ. Everything comes to an end. Well, here we are—and it's time to say "good-bye." [*Looks at his watch.*] There was a lunch for us at the city hall, and we drank champagne and the mayor made a speech. I ate and listened, but my heart was with all of you here . . . [*Glances round the garden.*] I've grown so . . . so accustomed to you.

OLGA. Do you think we'll ever meet again?

VERSHININ. Probably not! [*A pause.*] My wife and two little girls will be staying on for another month or so. Please, if anything happens, if they need anything . . .

OLGA. Yes, yes, of course. Don't worry about it. [*A pause.*] Tomorrow there won't be a single soldier left in town . . . Everything will be just a memory, and a new life will begin for us here . . . [*A pause.*] Nothing has turned out as we expected. I didn't want to be headmistress, but I've become one, which means that I shall never go to Moscow . . .

VERSHININ. Well . . . Thank you for everything. Forgive me if ever I've done anything wrong . . . I've talked a lot, far too much, I'm afraid . . . Forgive me for that, too.

OLGA [*wipes her eyes*]. Oh . . . why doesn't Masha come?

VERSHININ. What else can I say now it's time to say "good-bye"? What shall I philosophize about now? . . . [*Laughs.*] Yes, life is hard. It seems quite hopeless for most of us, just a blank . . . And yet you must admit that it is gradually getting easier and more hopeful, and there's no doubt about it that the time isn't far off when happiness will be everywhere. [*Looks at his watch.*] It's time for me to go . . . In the old days men were always at war, our life was filled with nothing but campaigns, invasions, retreats, victories . . . All that's out of date now, and in its place there's a great void which can't be filled. Humanity is passionately searching for something to fill that void, and, of course, it will find something some day. Oh! If only it would happen soon! [*A pause.*] If only we could make working people aware of culture and make our cultured people work . . . [*Looks at his watch.*] I really must go . . .

OLGA. Here she comes!

[*Enter MASHA.*]

VERSHININ. I've come to say good-bye . . .

[*OLGA walks off and stands a little to one side so they can say good-bye.*]

MASHA [*looking into his face*]. Good-bye! [*A long kiss.*]

OLGA. All right, that'll do.

[*MASHA sobs loudly.*]

VERSHININ. Write to me . . . Don't forget me! Let me go now . . . It's time. Olga Sergeyevna, please take her . . . I must go . . . I'm late as it is . . . [*Deeply moved, he kisses OLGA's hands, then embraces MASHA once more and goes out quickly.*]

OLGA. Please, Masha! Don't my dear, don't . . .

[*Enter KULYGIN.*]

KULYGIN [*embarrassed*]. Never mind, let her cry, let her . . . My good Masha, my dear, sweet Masha . . . You're my wife, and I'm happy in spite of everything . . . I'm not complaining, I won't blame you—Olga is my witness

. . . We'll start our life over again just like it used to be, and I won't say a word . . . Not a word . . .

MASHA [*suppressing her sobs*]. "A green oak grows by a curving shore, And round that oak hangs a golden chain." . . . "A golden chain round that oak." . . . Oh, I'm going mad . . . By a curving shore . . . a green oak . . .

OLGA. Quiet, Masha, calm yourself . . . Give her some water.

MASHA. I'm not crying any more . . .

KULYGIN. She's stopped crying . . . she's such a good girl.

[*The hollow sound of a gunshot is heard in the distance.*]

MASHA. "A green oak grows by a curving shore, And round that oak hangs a golden chain." A green cat . . . a green oak . . . I've got it all mixed up . . . [*Drinks water.*] My life's mixed up . . . I don't want anything now . . . I'll be quiet in a minute . . . It doesn't matter . . . What is "the curving shore"? Why does it keep coming into my head all the time? Why does it haunt me? My thoughts are all mixed up.

[*Enter IRINA.*]

OLGA. Calm down, Masha. That's right . . . good girl! . . . Let's go inside.

MASHA [*irritably*]. I'm not going in there! [*Sobs, but immediately checks herself.*] I am not going into that house ever again!

IRINA. Let's all just sit here for a minute, and not say anything. I'm leaving tomorrow, you know . . . [*A pause.*]

KULYGIN. Yesterday I took this beard away from one of the boys. I've got it here. [*Puts it on.*] Do I look just like the German teacher? . . . [*Laughs.*] I do, don't I? Those boys are funny.

MASHA. Yes, you do look like that German of yours.

OLGA [*laughs*]. Yes, he does.

[*MASHA cries.*]

IRINA. Stop it, Masha!

KULYGIN. Yes, a great deal like him, I think!

NATASHA [*to the maid*]. What? Oh, yes. Mr. Protopopov is going to watch Sofotchka, and Andrey Sergeyevich is going to take Bobik out in the carriage. Children are such a bother! . . . [*To IRINA.*] So you're really leaving tomorrow, Irina? What a shame! Why don't you stay another week? [*Seeing KULYGIN, shrieks; he laughs and takes off the false beard.*] Why look at you! How you frightened me! [*To IRINA.*] I've gotten so used to your being here . . . You mustn't think it's going to be easy for me after you're gone. I'll put Andrey and his old violin into your room: there he can saw away at it as much as he likes. And then we'll put Sofotchka into his study. She's such a darling child, really! Really a wonderful child! This morning she looked at me with her big eyes and said: "Mommie!"

KULYGIN. That's true, she is a beautiful child.

NATASHA. So tomorrow I'll be alone here. [*Sighs.*] First, I'll have these firs cut down, then that maple tree. It's so ugly in the evening . . . [*To IRINA.*] My dear, that sash doesn't suit you at all. It's such bad taste. You ought to get something bright and shiny . . . I'll tell them to put flowers everywhere, lots of flowers, and there'll be such a lovely scent . . . [*Sternly.*] What's this fork doing on the table? [*Going into the house, to the maid.*] Why was that fork left? [*Shouts.*] Answer me!

KULYGIN. She's started again!

[A band plays a military march off-stage; all listen.]

OLGA. They're going.

[Enter CHEBUTYKIN.]

MASHA. The soldiers are going. Well . . . happy journey to them! [To her husband.] We must go home . . . where are my hat and cape? . . .

KULYGIN. I took them into the house. I'll get them.

OLGA. Yes, we can go home now. It's time.

CHEBUTYKIN. Olga Sergeyevna!

OLGA. What is it? [A pause.] What?

CHEBUTYKIN. Nothing . . . I don't know quite how to tell you . . . [Whispers in her ear.]

OLGA [frightened]. It can't be!

CHEBUTYKIN. Yes . . . it's too bad . . . I'm so tired . . . worn out . . . I don't want to say another word . . . [With annoyance.] Anyway, nothing matters!

MASHA. What happened?

OLGA [puts her arms around IRINA]. This is a terrible day! . . . I don't know how to tell you dear . . .

IRINA. What is it? Tell me quickly, what is it? For God's sake! . . . [Cries.]

CHEBUTYKIN. The Baron's just been killed in a duel.

IRINA [cries quietly]. I knew it, I knew it . . .

CHEBUTYKIN [goes to the table and sits down]. I'm tired . . . [Takes a newspaper out of his pocket.] Let them cry . . . [Sings quietly to himself.] "Tarara-boom-di-ay, I'm sitting on a tomb-di-ay" . . . What difference does it make?

[The three sisters stand huddled together.]

MASHA. Oh, listen to the music! They're leaving us . . . one has already gone, gone for good . . . forever! And now we're left alone . . . to start our lives all over again. We must go on living . . . we must go on living . . .

IRINA [puts her head on OLGA's breast]. Some day people will know why such things happen, and what the purpose of all this suffering is . . . Then there won't be any more mysteries . . . Meanwhile we must go on living . . . we must work. To work! Tomorrow I'll go away alone and teach in a school somewhere; I'll give my life to people who need it . . . It's autumn now, it will be winter soon, and everything will be covered with snow . . . But I'll go on working . . . I will work . . .

OLGA [puts her arms round both her sisters]. How happy the music is . . . I almost feel as if I wanted to live! Oh, God! The years will pass, and we shall all be gone. We shall be forgotten . . . Our faces, our voices will be forgotten and people will even forget that there were once three of us here . . . But our sufferings will mean happiness for those who come after us . . . Then peace and happiness will reign on earth, and we shall be remembered kindly and blessed. No, my dear sisters, our lives aren't finished yet. We shall live! The band is playing and soon we shall know why we live, why we suffer . . . Oh, if we only knew, if only we knew!

[The music grows fainter and fainter. KULYGIN, smiling cheerfully, brings out the hat and the cape. ANDREY enters pushing the carriage with Bobik in it.]

CHEBUTYKIN [*sings quietly to himself*]. "Tarara-boom-di-ay . . . I'm sitting on a tomb-di-ay" [*Reads the paper.*] It doesn't matter. Nothing matters!

OLGA. If only we knew, if only we knew! . . .

Curtain.

COMMENTARY

Three Sisters is surely one of the saddest works in all literature. It is also one of the most saddening. As it draws to a close, and for some time after Olga has uttered her hopeless desire to know whether life and its suffering have any meaning, we must make a conscious effort if we are not to be overcome by the depression that threatens our spirits. The frustration and hopelessness to which the persons of the drama fall prey seems to be not only their doom but ours as well. For between ourselves and those persons in *Three Sisters* with whom we sympathize there is remarkably little distance, certainly as compared, say, with the distance that separates us from Lear. Apart from the difference in nationality, nothing stands in the way of our saying that they are much like ourselves and our friends. They are decent, well-intentioned people, not extraordinary in their gifts but above the general run of mankind in intelligence and sensitivity, well enough educated to take pleasure in the arts and to aspire to freedom, the enjoyment of beauty, and the natural development of their personalities, all the benefits to which we give the name of "the good life."

And in fact, apart from their recognizability, these people are made especially easy for us to come close to because Chekhov, in representing them, takes full account of an element of human life that the tragic dramatists were not concerned with. Sophocles and Shakespeare represented life in terms of character and fate. Chekhov proposes the part that is played in our existence by environment. There is nothing that more readily fosters our intimacy with other people than an awareness of the actual and particular conditions in which they live their lives from day to day.

Character, in the sense in which we use it of the creations of the great tragic dramatists, means the way in which a person confronts the things that happen to him, a number of which may come about as a consequence of his characteristic behavior. Fate is the sum of the decisive things that happen to a person, whether as the result of his characteristic behavior, or fortuitously, or at the behest of some transcendent power. Environment signifies those material and social circumstances in which an individual leads his existence, in particular those that make for his well-being or lack of it and that seem to condition his character and fate.

Since all events take place under nameable conditions, environment is an integral element of all dramatic genres, including tragedy. In the story of Oedipus, for example, it is clearly of consequence that Oedipus is king of Thebes, not of Athens, and that he lives as befits a king and not, say, a merchant. But we are not asked to be aware of these circumstances except in a general way. Our imagination of Oedipus in his regal life does not include particularities such as the boring ceremonial a king must endure, the strain of being always in the public eye, his exasperated sense of the frivolity of the in-

numerable palace servants, whose gossip and petty intrigue are a perpetual nuisance . . . and so on.

The modern literary imagination almost always conceives environment as adverse, as comprising those material and social conditions of life which constrain and hamper the protagonist and thwart his ideal development and which, more than anything that might happen to him in a sudden dramatic way, make his destiny. The habit of thinking about a human life in relation to its environment is of relatively recent growth. It began, roughly speaking, in the eighteenth century. Since then it has achieved an importance that can scarcely be overestimated.

This sense of the influence of environment on character and fate has deeply changed the traditional way of thinking about morality and politics. It enables us to believe in an essential quality of humanity, about which predications can be made, usually to the effect that it is by nature good, and then to go on to judge whether a particular circumstance in which an individual is placed is appropriate or inappropriate to his essential humanity. It thus serves as a principle of explanation in the personal life, and as a ground of social action. Few people can hear the contemporary phrase "juvenile delinquent" without immediately thinking of the family and neighborhood circumstances—the environment—that fostered the undesirable behavior of the young person. And in our view of ourselves we have learned to give great significance to the conditions of our lives, those that made us what we are and those that keep us from being what we might wish to be.

The awareness of environment is, as I have said, salient in our response to *Three Sisters*. We are never permitted to forget that the people in Chekhov's play are required to live in a certain way—far from the metropolis, Moscow, in a dreary provincial city; possessing the tastes and desires of a certain social class yet lacking the money to fulfill their expectations of life; bored by and disaffected from their professions. Their desperate unhappiness is not the result of an event, of some catastrophic shock, but, rather, a condition of life itself, the slow relentless withdrawal of all that had once been promised of delight and satisfaction. To catastrophe we can sometimes respond by mustering up our energies of resistance or fortitude, but the unhappiness that Chekhov represents is that of people who, as the environment takes its toll of them, have fewer and fewer energies of resistance or endurance, let alone renovation. It is a state that few of us can fail in at least some degree to know from experience, and our knowledge of it makes us peculiarly responsive to the pathos of *Three Sisters*. We are not surprised to hear that when the manuscript of the play was read to the members of the Moscow Art Theatre who were to perform it, the company was so deeply moved that many wept as they listened.

Chekhov did not take their tears as a tribute. He told them that they had quite misconceived the nature of *Three Sisters*, which was, he said, a "gay comedy, almost a farce." This may well be the strangest comment on his own work that a writer ever made. And Chekhov did not make it casually or playfully, as a provocative paradox. He insisted on it. The famous head of the Moscow Theatre, Constantin Stanislavsky, who directed and championed Chekhov's plays, says in his memoirs that he can remember no opinion ever expressed by Chekhov that the author defended so passionately; he held it, Stanislavsky says, "until his dying day" and believed that his play had failed

if it was understood otherwise. Yet he was never able to make clear what he meant by this strange idea. Another theatrical colleague, Vladimir Nemirovich Danchenko, who was even closer to Chekhov than Stanislavsky was, tells us that when the actors asked him for an explanation of such a view, he never could advance reasons to substantiate it.¹ To his friends in the theatre it was plain that Chekhov was not being perverse, that he truly believed that this saddest of plays was a comedy. But why he believed this they did not know.

And perhaps we cannot know. At the end of Plato's *Symposium*, when all the other guests at the great party have fallen asleep, Socrates sits drinking with the comic poet Aristophanes and the tragic poet Agathon, compelling them "to acknowledge that the genius of comedy was the same with that of tragedy, and that the true artist in tragedy was an artist in comedy also. To this they were constrained to assent, being drowsy and not quite following the argument."² How the argument ran was not reported and will never be known. And it may well be that Chekhov's reason for calling *Three Sisters* a comedy despite all its sadness will also never be known, even by inference.

But perhaps we today are in a better position to speculate about it than were the members of the Moscow Art Theatre. To the people of his own time, the new and striking thing about the plays of Chekhov was that they expressed so fully the pathos of personal aspiration frustrated by social and cultural circumstances. The latter part of the nineteenth century in Russia saw the rapid development of the class of intelligentsia, as it was called, people of sensibility and education, readily accessible to the influence of ideas and ideals, who could imagine and desire more in the way of fulness of life than they would ever achieve.³ This discrepancy is common to similar groups in all nations, but what made it especially marked in Russia was the repressiveness of the Czarist government and the backwardness of the economy. A young Russian who undertook to live the life of intellect and art, or simply the good life in which intellect and art have their place, had fewer opportunities to do so than a young person elsewhere in Europe. His will, checked and baffled, lost its impetus and turned back upon itself in bitterness and self-recrimination. All Chekhov's plays are concerned with the defeat of delicate and generous minds, and the warmth of feeling that the Russian intelligentsia directed to Chekhov in his lifetime was in gratitude for his having made its plight so fully explicit and for having treated its pathos with so affectionate a tenderness. It is not too much to say that the intelligentsia of Chekhov's time received the pathos of his plays as a precious gift and cherished it dearly.

¹ I have derived this account of Chekhov's view of the play from *The Oxford Chekhov*, translated and edited by Ronald Hingley, Volume III, pp. 314-316.

² Jowett's translation.

³ "Intelligentsia" is the form in which the Russian word *intelligentsiya* came into English (about 1914). Although it is now an accredited English word, it is used rather less frequently than it formerly was, having been somewhat displaced by "intellectuals." But "intelligentsia" has a special usefulness because it implies not so much the actual use of the intellect as the prestige of living by ideas and ideals and in relation to the arts. There is thus an overtone of irony in the use of the word which is perhaps intended to appear in the definition given by the *Oxford English Dictionary*: "The class of society to which culture, superior intelligence, and advanced political views are attributed."

The Russian intelligentsia was recruited from several social classes, but most of the characters of Chekhov's plays derive from the minor aristocracy or gentry, usually more or less impoverished.

But what was new at the turn of the century is now fairly old. Although the theme of the adverse social or cultural environment is still central to our thought, by the same token it is pretty much taken for granted. The personal frustration that Chekhov's characters suffered is now no longer assumed to be the inevitable fate of the members of the intelligentsia; today, at least in some countries, they can look forward to lives of considerable freedom and activity, even affluence and power. As a consequence, while we respond, and even deeply, to the pathos of Chekhov's plays, we are not likely to value it in the same degree that it was valued by the members of the Moscow Art Theatre.

This being so, it is easier for us than it was for his colleagues in the theatre to suppose that Chekhov himself did not want his audiences to feel only the sadness of *Three Sisters*, although it had of course been his purpose to evoke it and make it poignant and salient. He also had another and what might seem a contradictory intention: to lead his audience *away* from those very emotions in the play which they most cherished. When Chekhov said that *Three Sisters* was a comedy, even a farce, he was not talking to critics or theorists of literature but to actors, and he was trying to suggest what should be brought to the text by those who put it on the stage, a complexity of meaning which the text might not at first reveal. The meaning of a highly developed work of literature cannot ever be given in a formula, and Chekhov's plays resist formulation rather more than most. Chekhov did not undertake to solve life; he was averse to the propagation of ideas, his sole purpose, he said, was to represent life as it really is. But life cannot be seen without judgment of some kind, and throughout *Three Sisters*, as throughout his other great plays, Chekhov undertakes to influence our judgment in many ways, giving us ground for sympathy with one character, of antipathy to another, of contempt for yet another, of distaste for this or that circumstance of existence, controlling not only the direction of our feelings but their duration and intensity as well, so that contempt begins to give way suddenly to understanding, or admiration to irony. Much, then, of our sense of the meaning of *Three Sisters* when we see it performed depends upon the style of the performance—upon, that is, the ability of the actors to complicate its emotional communication.

Stanislavsky, we are told, had a tendency to produce all Chekhov's plays in a deliberate and dramatic style, which emphasized the moments of painful feeling and made the plays into what were called "heavy dramas." This method, which in effect invited the audience to self-pity before the hopelessness of life, was no doubt the loyal Stanislavsky's way of expressing his sense of Chekhov's seriousness and importance. But if *Three Sisters* is acted with the lightness and the rapid tempo of the comic style, or with some of the briskness of farce, the response of the audience is bound to be different. The play will not then offer an exactly cheerful view of things; it will still be saying that life is, in all conscience, hard and bitterly disappointing. But this will not be its sole judgment. The seeming contradiction between the sadness of the text and the vivacity of the style will suggest an inconclusiveness of judgment, inviting the audience not to the indulgence of self-pity but to a thoughtful, perhaps even an ironic detachment.

Whether or not we accept the play as a comedy, we cannot fail to see that there is comedy in it, and a performance in the comic style will give full recognition to its abundant humor of character. All the male characters, in one

degree or another, provoke our laughter or at least our smiles—Vershinin by his compulsion to make visionary speeches about mankind's future happiness, Andrey by his fatness, Chebutykin by his avowed total ignorance of medicine, Solyony by his absurd social behavior, especially his belief that he resembles the great romantic poet Lermontov, Kulygin by his pedantry and silliness, even poor good Tusenbach by his confidence that he can solve the problems of existence by going to work for a brick company. It is an aspect of his gift that Chekhov is able to make us laugh at these people without allowing us to despise them. Our laughter is a skeptical comment on the facile belief that nothing but the circumstances of environment account for people's destinies, for what we laugh at is the self-deception, or the pretension, or the infirmity of purpose that in some large part explains their pain and defeat—and our own.

The three sisters themselves, however, appear in a light very different from that in which the male characters are placed. We cannot say of them, as we do of the men, that they have helped contrive their defeat; the situation of women being what it was when Chekhov was writing, there was virtually no way by which they might have triumphed over circumstances to avoid the waste of their lives. Each of the three girls had, to be sure, overestimated the chances of happiness, but what they had imagined and desired was not beyond reason. Such deceptions as they practice on themselves do not warp their personalities into comic eccentricity, as happens with all the men. In the sisters, we feel, life appears in its normality, rather beautiful: they are finely developed human beings of delicate and generous mind. And the end of the play finds each of them doomed to unfulfilment, bitterly grieving over her fate, despite the resolution to live out her life in courageous affirmation. That this final scene is intensely sad goes without saying. But it is an open question for the reader or the stage director whether the exaltation of fortitude and faith that the sisters muster up in the face of defeat is to be taken ironically, as a delusion which makes the sadness yet more intense, or whether it is to be understood as sounding a true note of affirmation. The answer to the question should perhaps be conditioned by the knowledge that the scene was written by a dying man.

Chekhov suffered from tuberculosis, at that time a disease not easily cured. A physician of considerable skill, although he had given up the practice of medicine, he was not likely to be under any illusion about his chances of recovery; he died four years after the production of *Three Sisters*, at the age of forty-five. His illness did not deprive him of all gratification. He worked, although against odds. His work was honored, and he was much loved. But he had to live in exile from Moscow, even from Russia; he was often in pain, physical activity became ever less possible; he was often separated from his young wife for long periods. It could not have been without thought of himself that he wrote such despairing speeches as the one in which Irina says, "Where has it all gone? Where is it? . . . life's slipping by, and it will never, never return. . . ."

Yet as we read Chekhov's letters of the last years of his illness, we find no despair in them, no bitterness, not even the sorrow we might expect to find. They are full of the often trivial details of travel, business, and work, of expressions of concern and affection for others, they address themselves to ordinary, unexceptional life, without tragic reverberations, even without drama. Perhaps an unwillingness to burden others with his darker thoughts in some

part explains why Chekhov wrote as he did, but as one reads the letters alongside the plays, one feels that Chekhov was living life as the speeches at the end of *Three Sisters* suggest it must be lived: without the expectation of joy, yet in full attachment, and cherishing what may be cherished, even if that is nothing more than the idea of life itself. A man of affectionate disposition upon whom death had laid its hand would probably not be concerned with making a rational or prudential judgment upon life: more likely he would be moved to wonder if a transcendent judgment might not be made. And when Chekhov wrote that "it will be winter soon, and everything will be covered with snow," he may well have wished to suggest that in the cycle of the seasons the spring will follow and that, sad as we may be over what befalls ourselves and others, life itself is to be celebrated. Over the centuries the attributes and intentions of comedy have been numerous and various. But one of the oldest of them has been to say that, appearances to the contrary notwithstanding, all will be well, the life of the earth will renew itself.

THE DOCTOR'S DILEMMA

GEORGE BERNARD SHAW

1856-1950

ACT I

On the 15th June 1903, in the early forenoon, a medical student, surname REDPENNY, Christian name unknown and of no importance, sits at work in a doctor's consulting room. He devils for the doctor by answering his letters, acting as his domestic laboratory assistant, and making himself indispensable generally, in return for unspecified advantages involved by intimate intercourse with a leader of his profession, and amounting to an informal apprenticeship and a temporary affiliation. REDPENNY is not proud, and will do anything he is asked without reservation of his personal dignity if he is asked in a fellow-creaturely way. He is a wide-open-eyed, ready, credulous, friendly, hasty youth, with his hair and clothes in reluctant transition from the untidy boy to the tidy doctor.

REDPENNY is interrupted by the entrance of an old serving-woman who has never known the cares, the preoccupations, the responsibilities, jealousies, and anxieties of personal beauty. She has the complexion of a never-washed gypsy, incurable by any detergent; and she has, not a regular beard and moustaches, which could at least be trimmed and waxed into a masculine presentableness, but a whole crop of small beards and moustaches, mostly springing from moles all over her face. She carries a duster and toddles about meddlesomely, spying out

dust so diligently that whilst she is flicking off one speck she is already looking elsewhere for another. In conversation she has the same trick, hardly ever looking at the person she is addressing except when she is excited. She has only one manner, and that is the manner of an old family nurse to a child just after it has learnt to walk. She has used her ugliness to secure indulgences unattainable by Cleopatra or Fair Rosamund, and has the further great advantage over them that age increases her qualification instead of impairing it. Being an industrious, agreeable, and popular old soul, she is a walking sermon on the vanity of feminine prettiness. Just as REDPENNY has no discovered Christian name, she has no discovered surname, and is known throughout the doctor's quarter between Cavendish Square and the Marylebone Road simply as EMMY.

The consulting room has two windows looking on Queen Anne Street. Between the two is a marble-topped console, with haunched gilt legs ending in sphinx claws. The huge pierglass which surmounts it is mostly disabled from reflection by elaborate painting on its surface of palms, ferns, lilies, tulips, and sunflowers. The adjoining wall contains the fireplace, with two arm-chairs before it. As we happen to face the corner we see nothing of the other two walls. On the right of the fireplace, or rather on the right of any person facing the fireplace, is the door. On its left is the writing-table at which REDPENNY sits. It is an untidy table with a microscope, several test tubes, and a spirit lamp standing up through its litter of papers. There is a couch in the middle of the room, at right angles to the console, and parallel to the fireplace. A chair stands between the couch and the window. Another in the corner. Another at the other end of the windowed wall. The windows have green Venetian blinds and rep curtains; and there is a gasolier; but it is a convert to electric lighting. The wall paper and carpets are mostly green, coeval with the gasolier and the Venetian blinds. The house, in fact, was so well furnished in the middle of the XIXth century that it stands unaltered to this day and is still quite presentable.

EMMY [*Entering and immediately beginning to dust the couch*]. 'Theres¹ a lady bothering me to see the doctor.

REDPENNY [*distracted by the interruption*]. Well, she cant see the doctor. Look here: whats the use of telling you that the doctor cant take any new patients, when the moment a knock comes to the door, in you bounce to ask whether he can see somebody?

EMMY. Who asked you whether he could see somebody?

REDPENNY. You did.

EMMY. I said theres a lady bothering me to see the doctor. That isnt asking. Its telling.

REDPENNY. Well, is the lady bothering you a reason for you to come bothering me when I'm busy?

EMMY. Have you seen the papers?

REDPENNY. No.

EMMY. Not seen the birthday honors?

REDPENNY [*beginning to swear*]. What the—

EMMY. Now, now, ducky!

¹ Shaw, who enjoyed adopting radical positions, wanted to reform English spelling. He particularly disliked the apostrophe, where he thought it useless.

REDPENNY. What do you suppose I care about the birthday honors? Get out of this with your chattering. Dr Ridgeon will be down before I have these letters ready. Get out.

EMMY. Dr Ridgeon wont never be down any more, young man. [*She detects dust on the console and is down on it immediately.*]

REDPENNY [*jumping up and following her*]. What?

EMMY. He's been made a knight. Mind you dont go Dr Ridgeoning him in them letters. Sir Colenso Ridgeon is to be his name now.

REDPENNY. I'm jolly glad.

EMMY. I never was so taken aback. I always thought his great discoveries was fudge (let alone the mess of them) with his drops of blood and tubes full of Maltese fever and the like. Now he'll have a rare laugh at me.

REDPENNY. Serve you right! It was like your cheek to talk to him about science. [*He returns to his table and resumes his writing.*]

EMMY. Oh, I dont think much of science; and neither will you when youve lived as long with it as I have. Whats on my mind is answering the door. Old Sir Patrick Cullen has been here already and left first congratulations—hadnt time to come up on his way to the hospital, but was determined to be first—coming back, he said. All the rest will be here too: the knocker will be going all day. What I'm afraid of is that the doctor'll want a footman like all the rest, now that he's Sir Colenso. Mind: dont you go putting him up to it, ducky; for he'll never have any comfort with anybody but me to answer the door. I know who to let in and who to keep out. And that reminds me of the poor lady. I think he ought to see her. She's just the kind that puts him in a good temper. [*She dusts REDPENNY's papers.*]

REDPENNY. I tell you he cant see anybody. Do go away, Emmy. How can I work with you dusting all over me like this?

EMMY. I'm not hindering you working—if you call writing letters working. There goes the bell. [*She looks out of the window.*] A doctor's carriage. Thats more congratulations. [*She is going out when SIR COLENZO RIDGEON enters.*] Have you finished your two eggs, sonny?

RIDGEON. Yes.

EMMY. Have you put on your clean vest?

RIDGEON. Yes.

EMMY. Thats my ducky diamond! Now keep yourself tidy and dont go messing about and dirtying your hands: the people are coming to congratulate you. [*She goes out.*]

[*SIR COLENZO RIDGEON is a man of fifty who has never shaken off his youth. He has the off-handed manner and the little audacities of address which a shy and sensitive man acquires in breaking himself in to intercourse with all sorts and conditions of men. His face is a good deal lined; his movements are slower than, for instance, REDPENNY's; and his flaxen hair has lost its lustre; but in figure and manner he is more the young man than the titled physician. Even the lines in his face are those of overwork and restless skepticism, perhaps partly of curiosity and appetite, rather than that of age. Just at present the announcement of his knight-hood in the morning papers makes him self-conscious, and consequently specially off-hand with REDPENNY.*]

RIDGEON. Have you seen the papers? Youll have to alter the name in the letters if you havnt.

REDPENNY. Emmy has just told me. I'm awfully glad. I—

RIDGEON. Enough, young man, enough. You will soon get accustomed to it.

REDPENNY. They ought to have done it years ago.

RIDGEON. They would have; only they couldnt stand Emmy opening the door, I daresay.

EMMY [*at the door, announcing*]. Dr Shoemaker. [*She withdraws.*]

[*A middle-aged gentleman, well dressed, comes in with a friendly but propitiatory air, not quite sure of his reception. His combination of soft manners and responsive kindness, with a certain unseizable reserve and a familiar yet foreign chiselling of feature, reveal the Jew: in this instance the handsome gentlemanly Jew, gone a little pigeon-breasted and stale after thirty, as handsome young Jews often do, but still decidedly good-looking.*]

THE GENTLEMAN. Do you remember me? Schutzmacher. University College school and Belsize Avenue. Loony Schutzmacher, you know.

RIDGEON. What! Loony! [*He shakes hands cordially.*] Why, man, I thought you were dead long ago. Sit down. [*SCHUTZMACHER sits on the couch: RIDGEON on the chair between it and the window.*] Where have you been these thirty years?

SCHUTZMACHER. In general practice, until a few months ago. Ive retired.

RIDGEON. Well done, Loony! I wish I could afford to retire. Was your practice in London?

SCHUTZMACHER. No.

RIDGEON. Fashionable coast practice, I suppose.

SCHUTZMACHER. How could I afford to buy a fashionable practice? I hadnt a rap. I set up in a manufacturing town in the midlands in a little surgery at ten shillings a week.

RIDGEON. And made your fortune?

SCHUTZMACHER. Well, I'm pretty comfortable. I have a place in Hertfordshire besides our flat in town. If you ever want a quiet Saturday to Monday, I'll take you down in my motor at an hour's notice.

RIDGEON. Just rolling in money! I wish you rich g.p.'s would teach me how to make some. Whats the secret of it?

SCHUTZMACHER. Oh, in my case the secret was simple enough, though I suppose I should have got into trouble if it had attracted any notice. And I'm afraid youll think it rather infra dig.

RIDGEON. Oh, I have an open mind. What was the secret?

SCHUTZMACHER. Well, the secret was just two words.

RIDGEON. Not Consultation Free, was it?

SCHUTZMACHER [*shocked*]. No, no. Really!

RIDGEON [*apologetic*]. Of course not. I was only joking.

SCHUTZMACHER. My two words were simply Cure Guaranteed.

RIDGEON [*admiring*]. Cure Guaranteed!

SCHUTZMACHER. Guaranteed. After all, thats what everybody wants from a doctor, isnt it?

RIDGEON. My dear Loony, it was an inspiration. Was it on the brass plate?

SCHUTZMACHER. There was no brass plate. It was a shop window: red, you know, with black lettering. Doctor Leo Schutzmacher, L.R.C.P., M.R.C.S. Advice and medicine sixpence. Cure Guaranteed.

RIDGEON. And the guarantee proved sound nine times out of ten, eh?

SCHUTZMACHER [*rather hurt at so moderate an estimate*]. Oh, much oftener than that. You see, most people get well all right if they are careful and you give them a little sensible advice. And the medicine really did them good. Parrish's Chemical Food: phosphates, you know. One tablespoonful to a twelve-ounce bottle of water: nothing better, no matter what the case is.

RIDGEON. Redpenny: make a note of Parrish's Chemical Food.

SCHUTZMACHER. I take it myself, you know, when I feel run down. Good-bye. You don't mind my calling, do you? Just to congratulate you.

RIDGEON. Delighted, my dear Loony. Come to lunch on Saturday next week. Bring your motor and take me down to Hertford.

SCHUTZMACHER. I will. We shall be delighted. Thank you. Goodbye. [*He goes out with RIDGEON, who returns immediately.*]

REDPENNY. Old Paddy Cullen was here before you were up, to be the first to congratulate you.

RIDGEON. Indeed. Who taught you to speak of Sir Patrick Cullen as old Paddy Cullen, you young ruffian?

REDPENNY. You never call him anything else.

RIDGEON. Not now that I am Sir Colenso. Next thing, you fellows will be calling me old Colly Ridgeon.

REDPENNY. We do, at St Anne's.

RIDGEON. Yach! That's what makes the medical student the most disgusting figure in modern civilization. No veneration, no manners—no—

EMMY [*at the door, announcing*]. Sir Patrick Cullen. [*She retires.*]

[*SIR PATRICK CULLEN is more than twenty years older than RIDGEON, not yet quite at the end of his tether, but near it and resigned to it. His name, his plain, downright, sometimes rather arid common sense, his large build and stature, the absence of those odd moments of ceremonial servility by which an old English doctor sometimes shows you what the status of the profession was in England in his youth, and an occasional turn of speech, are Irish; but he has lived all his life in England and is thoroughly acclimatized. His manner to RIDGEON, whom he likes, is whimsical and fatherly: to others he is a little gruff and uninviting, apt to substitute more or less expressive grunts for articulate speech, and generally indisposed, at his age, to make much social effort. He shakes RIDGEON's hand and beams at him cordially and jocularly.*]

SIR PATRICK. Well, young chap. Is your hat too small for you, eh?

RIDGEON. Much too small. I owe it all to you.

SIR PATRICK. Blarney, my boy. Thank you all the same. [*He sits in one of the armchairs near the fireplace. RIDGEON sits on the couch.*] I've come to talk to you a bit. [*To REDPENNY.*] Young man: get out.

REDPENNY. Certainly, Sir Patrick. [*He collects his paper and makes for the door.*]

SIR PATRICK. Thank you. That's a good lad. [*REDPENNY vanishes.*] They all put up with me, these young chaps, because I'm an old man, a real old man, not like you. You're only beginning to give yourself the airs of age. Did you ever see a boy cultivating a moustache? Well, a middle-aged doctor cultivating a grey head is much the same sort of spectacle.

RIDGEON. Good Lord! yes: I suppose so. And I thought that the days of my vanity were past. Tell me: at what age does a man leave off being a fool?

SIR PATRICK. Remember the Frenchman who asked his grandmother at

what age we get free from the temptations of love. The old woman said she didnt know. [RIDGEON *laughs*.] Well, I make you the same answer. But the world's growing very interesting to me now, Colly.

RIDGEON. You keep up your interest in science, do you?

SIR PATRICK. Lord! yes. Modern science is a wonderful thing. Look at your great discovery! Look at all the great discoveries! Where are they leading to? Why, right back to my poor dear old father's ideas and discoveries. He's been dead now over forty years. Oh, it's very interesting.

RIDGEON. Well, theres nothing like progress, is there?

SIR PATRICK. Dont misunderstand me, my boy. I'm not belittling your discovery. Most discoveries are made regularly every fifteen years; and it's fully a hundred and fifty since yours was made last. Thats something to be proud of. But your discovery's not new. It's only inoculation. My father practised inoculation until it was made criminal in eighteen-forty. That broke the poor old man's heart, Colly: he died of it. And now it turns out that my father was right after all. Youve brought us back to inoculation.

RIDGEON. I know nothing about smallpox. My line is tuberculosis and typhoid and plague. But of course the principle of all vaccines is the same.

SIR PATRICK. Tuberculosis? M-m-m-m! Youve found out how to cure consumption, eh?

RIDGEON. I believe so.

SIR PATRICK. Ah yes. It's very interesting. What is it the old cardinal says in Browning's play? "I have known four and twenty leaders of revolt." Well, Ive known over thirty men that found out how to cure consumption. Why do people go on dying of it, Colly? Devilment, I suppose. There was my father's old friend George Boddington of Sutton Coldfield. He discovered the open-air cure in eighteen-forty. He was ruined and driven out of his practice for only opening the windows; and now we wont let a consumptive patient have as much as a roof over his head. Oh, it's very very interesting to an old man.

RIDGEON. You old cynic, you dont believe a bit in my discovery.

SIR PATRICK. No, no: I dont go quite so far as that, Colly. But still, you remember Jane Marsh?

RIDGEON. Jane Marsh? No.

SIR PATRICK. You dont!

RIDGEON. No.

SIR PATRICK. You mean to tell me that you dont remember the woman with the tuberculous ulcer on her arm?

RIDGEON [*enlightened*]. Oh, your washerwoman's daughter. Was her name Jane Marsh? I forgot.

SIR PATRICK. Perhaps youve forgotten also that you undertook to cure her with Koch's tuberculin.

RIDGEON. And instead of curing her, it rotted her arm right off. Yes: I remember. Poor Jane! However, she makes a good living out of that arm now by shewing it at medical lectures.

SIR PATRICK. Still, that wasnt quite what you intended, was it?

RIDGEON. I took my chance of it.

SIR PATRICK. Jane did, you mean.

RIDGEON. Well, it's always the patient who has to take the chance when an experiment is necessary. And we can find out nothing without experiment.

SIR PATRICK. What did you find out from Jane's case?

RIDGEON. I found out that the inoculation that ought to cure sometimes kills.

SIR PATRICK. I could have told you that. I've tried these modern inoculations a bit myself. I've killed people with them; and I've cured people with them; but I gave them up because I never could tell which I was going to do.

RIDGEON [*taking a pamphlet from a drawer in the writing-table and handing it to him*]. Read that the next time you have an hour to spare; and you'll find out why.

SIR PATRICK [*grumbling and fumbling for his spectacles*]. Oh, bother your pamphlets. What's the practice of it? [*Looking at the pamphlet.*] Opsonin? What the devil is opsonin?

RIDGEON. Opsonin is what you butter the disease germs with to make your white blood corpuscles eat them. [*He sits down again on the couch.*]

SIR PATRICK. That's not new. I've heard this notion that the white corpuscles—what is it that what's his name?—Metchnikoff²—calls them?

RIDGEON. Phagocytes.

SIR PATRICK. Aye, phagocytes: yes, yes, yes. Well, I heard this theory that the phagocytes eat up the disease germs years ago: long before you came into fashion. Besides, they don't always eat them.

RIDGEON. They do when you butter them with opsonin.

SIR PATRICK. Gammon.

RIDGEON. No: it's not gammon. What it comes to in practice is this. The phagocytes won't eat the microbes unless the microbes are nicely buttered for them. Well, the patient manufactures the butter for himself all right; but my discovery is that the manufacture of that butter, which I call opsonin, goes on in the system by ups and downs—Nature being always rhythmical, you know—and that what the inoculation does is to stimulate the ups and downs, as the case may be. If we had inoculated Jane Marsh when her butter factory was on the up-grade, we should have cured her arm. But we got in on the down-grade and lost her arm for her. I call the up-grade the positive phase and the down-grade the negative phase. Everything depends on your inoculating at the right moment. Inoculate when the patient is in the negative phase and you kill: inoculate when the patient is in the positive phase and you cure.

SIR PATRICK. And pray how are you to know whether the patient is in the positive or the negative phase?

RIDGEON. Send a drop of the patient's blood to the laboratory at St Anne's; and in fifteen minutes I'll give you his opsonin index in figures. If the figure is one, inoculate and cure: if it's under point eight, inoculate and kill. That's my discovery: the most important that has been made since Harvey discovered the circulation of the blood. My tuberculosis patients don't die now.

SIR PATRICK. And mine do when my inoculation catches them in the negative phase, as you call it. Eh?

RIDGEON. Precisely. To inject a vaccine into a patient without first testing his opsonin is as near murder as a respectable practitioner can get. If I wanted to kill a man I should kill him that way.

² Elie Metchnikoff (1845–1916), a Russian biologist, in 1908 was awarded the Nobel prize, jointly with Paul Ehrlich, for his work on immunity.

EMMY [*looking in*]. Will you see a lady that wants her husband's lungs cured?

RIDGEON [*impatiently*]. No. Havnt I told you I will see nobody? [*To SIR PATRICK.*] I live in a state of siege ever since it got about that I'm a magician who can cure consumption with a drop of serum. [*To EMMY.*] Dont come to me again about people who have no appointments. I tell you I can see nobody.

EMMY. Well, I'll tell her to wait a bit.

RIDGEON [*furious*]. Youll tell her I cant see her, and send her away: do you hear?

EMMY [*unmoved*]. Well, will you see Mr Cutler Walpole? He dont want a cure: he only wants to congratulate you.

RIDGEON. Of course. Shew him up. [*She turns to go.*] Stop. [*To SIR PATRICK.*] I want two minutes more with you between ourselves. [*To EMMY.*] Emmy: ask Mr. Walpole to wait just two minutes, while I finish a consultation.

EMMY. Oh, he'll wait all right. He's talking to the poor lady. [*She goes out.*]

SIR PATRICK. Well? what is it?

RIDGEON. Dont laugh at me. I want your advice.

SIR PATRICK. Professional advice?

RIDGEON. Yes. Theres something the matter with me. I dont know what it is.

SIR PATRICK. Neither do I. I suppose youve been sounded.

RIDGEON. Yes, of course. Theres nothing wrong with any of the organs: nothing special, anyhow. But I have a curious aching: I dont know where: I cant localize it. Sometimes I think it's my heart: sometimes I suspect my spine. It doesnt exactly hurt me, but it unsettles me completely. I feel that something is going to happen. And there are other symptoms. Scraps of tunes come into my head that seem to me very pretty, though theyre quite commonplace.

SIR PATRICK. Do you hear voices?

RIDGEON. No.

SIR PATRICK. I'm glad of that. When my patients tell me that theyve made a greater discovery than Harvey, and that they hear voices, I lock them up.

RIDGEON. You think I'm mad! Thats just the suspicion that has come across me once or twice. Tell me the truth: I can bear it.

SIR PATRICK. Youre sure there are no voices?

RIDGEON. Quite sure.

SIR PATRICK. Then it's only foolishness.

RIDGEON. Have you ever met anything like it before in your practice?

SIR PATRICK. Oh, yes: often. It's very common between the ages of seventeen and twenty-two. It sometimes comes on again at forty or thereabouts. Youre a bachelor, you see. It's not serious—if youre careful.

RIDGEON. About my food?

SIR PATRICK. No: about your behavior. Theres nothing wrong with your spine; and theres nothing wrong with your heart; but theres something wrong with your common sense. Youre not going to die; but you may be going to make a fool of yourself. So be careful.

RIDGEON. I see you dont believe in my discovery. Well, sometimes I dont believe in it myself. Thank you all the same. Shall we have Walpole up?

SIR PATRICK. Oh, have him up. [*RIDGEON rings.*] He's a clever operator, is

Walpole, though he's only one of your chloroform surgeons. In my early days, you made your man drunk; and the porters and students held him down; and you had to set your teeth and finish the job fast. Nowadays you work at ease; and the pain doesn't come until afterwards, when you've taken your cheque and rolled up your bag and left the house. I tell you, Colly, chloroform has done a lot of mischief. It's enabled every fool to be a surgeon.

RIDGEON [*to EMMY, who answers the bell*]. Shew Mr Walpole up.

EMMY. He's talking to the lady.

RIDGEON [*exasperated*]. Did I not tell you—

[*EMMY goes out without heeding him. He gives it up, with a shrug, and plants himself with his back to the console, leaning resignedly against it.*]

SIR PATRICK. I know your Cutler Walpoles and their like. They've found out that a man's body's full of bits and scraps of old organs he has no mortal use for. Thanks to chloroform, you can cut half a dozen of them out without leaving him any the worse, except for the illness and the guineas it costs him. I knew the Walpoles well fifteen years ago. The father used to snip off the ends of people's uvulas for fifty guineas, and paint throats with caustic every day for a year at two guineas a time. His brother-in-law extirpated tonsils for two hundred guineas until he took up women's cases at double the fees. Cutler himself worked hard at anatomy to find something fresh to operate on; and at last he got hold of something he calls the nuciform sac, which he's made quite the fashion. People pay him five hundred guineas to cut it out. They might as well get their hair cut for all the difference it makes, but I suppose they feel important after it. You can't go out to dinner now without your neighbor bragging to you of some useless operation or other.

EMMY [*announcing*]. Mr Cutler Walpole. [*She goes out.*]

[*CUTLER WALPOLE is an energetic, unhesitating man of forty, with a cleanly modelled face, very decisive and symmetrical about the shortish, salient, rather pretty nose, and the three trimly turned corners made by his chin and jaws. In comparison with RIDGEON's delicate broken lines, and SIR PATRICK's softly rugged aged ones, his face looks machine-made and beeswaxed; but his scrutinizing, daring eyes give it life and force. He seems never at a loss, never in doubt: one feels that if he made a mistake he would make it thoroughly and firmly. He has neat, well-nourished hands, short arms, and is built for strength and compactness rather than for height. He is smartly dressed with a fancy waistcoat, a richly colored scarf secured by a handsome ring, ornaments on his watch chain, spats on his shoes, and a general air of the well-to-do sportsman about him. He goes straight across to RIDGEON and shakes hands with him.*]

WALPOLE. My dear Ridgeon, best wishes! heartiest congratulations! You deserve it.

RIDGEON. Thank you.

WALPOLE. As a man, mind you. You deserve it as a man. The opsonin is simple rot, as any capable surgeon can tell you; but we're all delighted to see your personal qualities officially recognized. Sir Patrick: how are you? I sent you a paper lately about a little thing I invented: a new saw. For shoulder blades.

SIR PATRICK [*meditatively*]. Yes: I got it. It's a good saw: a useful, handy instrument.

WALPOLE [*confidently*]. I knew you'd see its points.

SIR PATRICK. Yes: I remember that saw sixty-five years ago.

WALPOLE. What!

SIR PATRICK. It was called a cabinetmaker's jimmy then.

WALPOLE. Get out! Nonsense! Cabinetmaker be—

RIDGEON. Never mind him, Walpole. He's jealous.

WALPOLE. By the way, I hope I'm not disturbing you two in anything private.

RIDGEON. No, no. Sit down. I was only consulting him. I'm rather out of sorts. Overwork, I suppose.

WALPOLE [*swiftly*]. I know whats the matter with you. I can see it in your complexion. I can feel it in the grip of your hand.

RIDGEON. What is it?

WALPOLE. Blood-poisoning.

RIDGEON. Blood-poisoning! Impossible.

WALPOLE. I tell you, blood-poisoning. Ninety-five per cent of the human race suffer from chronic blood-poisoning, and die of it. It's as simple as A.B.C. Your nuciform sac is full of decaying matter—undigested food and waste products—rank ptomaines. Now you take my advice, Ridgeon. Let me cut it out for you. You'll be another man afterwards.

SIR PATRICK. Dont you like him as he is?

WALPOLE. No I dont. I dont like any man who hasnt a healthy circulation. I tell you this: in an intelligently governed country people wouldnt be allowed to go about with nuciform sacs, making themselves centres of infection. The operation ought to be compulsory: it's ten times more important than vaccination.

SIR PATRICK. Have you had your own sac removed, may I ask?

WALPOLE [*triumphantly*]. I havnt got one. Look at me! Ive no symptoms. I'm sound as a bell. About five per cent of the population havnt got any; and I'm one of the five per cent. I'll give you an instance. You know Mrs. Jack Foljambe: the smart Mrs. Foljambe? I operated at Easter on her sister-in-law, Lady Gorran, and found she had the biggest sac I ever saw: it held about two ounces. Well, Mrs Foljambe had the right spirit—the genuine hygienic instinct. She couldnt stand her sister-in-law being a clean, sound woman, and she simply a whited sepulchre. So she insisted on my operating on her, too. And by George, sir, she hadnt any sac at all. Not a trace! Not a rudiment! I was so taken aback—so interested, that I forgot to take the sponges out, and was stitching them up inside her when the nurse missed them. Somehow, I'd made sure she'd have an exceptionally large one. [*He sits down on the couch, squaring his shoulders and shooting his hands out of his cuffs as he sets his knuckles akimbo.*]

EMMY [*looking in*]. Sir Ralph Bloomfield Bonington.

[*A long and expectant pause follows this announcement. All look to the door; but there is no Sir Ralph.*]

RIDGEON [*at last*]. Where is he?

EMMY [*looking back*]. Drat him, I thought he was following me. He's stayed down to talk to that lady.

RIDGEON [*exploding*]. I told you to tell that lady—[*EMMY vanishes.*]

WALPOLE [*jumping up again*]. Oh, by the way, Ridgeon, that reminds me. I've been talking to that poor girl. It's her husband; and she thinks it's a case of consumption: the usual wrong diagnosis: these damned general practitioners ought never to be allowed to touch a patient except under the orders of a con-

sultant. She's been describing his symptoms to me; and the case is as plain as a pikestaff: bad blood-poisoning. Now she's poor. She cant afford to have him operated on. Well, you send him to me: I'll do it for nothing. Theres room for him in my nursing home. I'll put him straight, and feed him up and make her happy. I like making people happy. [*He goes to the chair near the window.*]

EMMY [*looking in*]. Here he is.

[*SIR RALPH BLOOMFIELD BONINGTON wafts himself into the room. He is a tall man, with a head like a tall and slender egg. He has been in his time a slender man; but now, in his sixth decade, his waistcoat has filled out somewhat. His fair eyebrows arch goodnaturedly and uncritically. He has a most musical voice; his speech is a perpetual anthem; and he never tires of the sound of it. He radiates an enormous self-satisfaction, cheering, reassuring, healing by the mere incompatibility of disease or anxiety with his welcome presence. Even broken bones, it is said, have been known to unite at the sound of his voice; he is a born healer, as independent of mere treatment and skill as any Christian scientist. When he expands into oratory or scientific exposition, he is as energetic as Walpole; but it is with a bland, voluminous, atmospheric energy, which envelops its subject and its audience, and makes interruption or inattention impossible, and imposes veneration and credulity on all but the strongest minds. He is known in the medical world as B. B.; and the envy roused by his success in practice is softened by the conviction that he is, scientifically considered, a colossal humbug: the fact being that, though he knows just as much (and just as little) as his contemporaries, the qualifications that pass muster in common men reveal their weakness when hung on his egregious personality.*]

B. B. Aha! Sir Colenso, Sir Colenso, eh? Welcome to the order of knighthood.

RIDGEON [*shaking hands*]. Thank you, B. B.

B. B. What! Sir Patrick! And how are we today? a little chilly? a little stiff? but hale and still the cleverest of us all. [*SIR PATRICK grunts.*] What! Walpole! the absent-minded beggar: eh?

WALPOLE. What does that mean?

B. B. Have you forgotten the lovely opera singer I sent you to have that growth taken off her vocal cords?

WALPOLE [*springing to his feet*]. Great heavens, man, you dont mean to say you sent her for a throat operation!

B. B. [*archly*]. Aha! Ha ha! Aha! [*trilling like a lark as he shakes his finger at Walpole*]. You removed her nuciform sac. Well, well! force of habit! force of habit! Never mind, ne-e-e-ver mind. She got back her voice after it, and thinks you the greatest surgeon alive; and so you are, so you are, so you are.

WALPOLE [*in a tragic whisper, intensely serious*]. Blood-poisoning. I see. I see. [*He sits down again.*]

SIR PATRICK. And how is a certain distinguished family getting on under your care, Sir Ralph?

B. B. Our friend Ridgeon will be gratified to hear that I have tried his opsonin treatment on little Prince Henry with complete success.

RIDGEON [*startled and anxious*]. But how—

B. B. [*continuing*]. I suspected typhoid: the head gardener's boy had it; so I just called at St Anne's one day and got a tube of your very excellent serum. You were out, unfortunately.

RIDGEON. I hope they explained to you carefully—

B. B. [*waving away the absurd suggestion*]. Lord bless you, my dear fellow, I didnt need any explanations. I'd left my wife in the carriage at the door; and I'd no time to be taught my business by your young chaps. I know all about it. Ive handled these anti-toxins ever since they first came out.

RIDGEON. But theyre not anti-toxins; and theyre dangerous unless you use them at the right time.

B. B. Of course they are. Everything is dangerous unless you take it at the right time. An apple at breakfast does you good: an apple at bedtime upsets you for a week. There are only two rules for anti-toxins. First, dont be afraid of them: second, inject them a quarter of an hour before meals, three times a day.

RIDGEON [*appalled*]. Great heavens, B. B., no, no, no.

B. B. [*sweeping on irresistibly*]. Yes, yes, yes, Colly. The proof of the pudding is in the eating, you know. It was an immense success. It acted like magic on the little prince. Up went his temperature; off to bed I packed him; and in a week he was all right again, and absolutely immune from typhoid for the rest of his life. The family were very nice about it: their gratitude was quite touching; but I said they owed it all to you, Ridgeon; and I am glad to think that your knighthood is the result.

RIDGEON. I am deeply obliged to you. [*Overcome, he sits down on the chair near the couch.*]

B. B. Not at all, not at all. Your own merit. Come! come! come! dont give way.

RIDGEON. It's nothing. I was a little giddy just now. Overwork, I suppose.

WALPOLE. Blood-poisoning.

B. B. Overwork! Theres no such thing. I do the work of ten men. Am I giddy? No. NO. If youre not well, you have a disease. It may be a slight one; but it's a disease. And what is a disease? The lodgment in the system of a pathogenic germ, and the multiplication of that germ. What is the remedy? A very simple one. Find the germ and kill it.

SIR PATRICK. Suppose theres no germ?

B. B. Impossible, Sir Patrick: there must be a germ: else how could the patient be ill?

SIR PATRICK. Can you shew me the germ of overwork?

B. B. No; but why? Why? Because, my dear Sir Patrick, though the germ is there, it's invisible. Nature has given it no danger signal for us. These germs—these bacilli—are translucent bodies, like glass, like water. To make them visible you must stain them. Well, my dear Paddy, do what you will, some of them wont stain. They wont take cochineal: they wont take any methylene blue: they wont take gentian violet: they wont take any coloring matter. Consequently, though we know, as scientific men, that they exist, we cannot see them. But can you disprove their existence? Can you conceive the disease existing without them? Can you, for instance, shew me a case of diphtheria without the bacillus?

SIR PATRICK. No; but I'll shew you the same bacillus, without the disease, in your own throat.

B. B. No, not the same, Sir Patrick. It is an entirely different bacillus; only the two are, unfortunately, so exactly alike that you cannot see the difference. You must understand, my dear Sir Patrick, that every one of these interesting little creatures has an imitator. Just as men imitate each other, germs imitate each

other. There is the genuine diphtheria bacillus discovered by Loeffler; and there is the pseudo-bacillus, exactly like it, which you could find, as you say, in my own throat.

SIR PATRICK. And how do you tell one from the other?

B. B. Well, obviously, if the bacillus is the genuine Loeffler, you have diphtheria; and if it's the pseudo-bacillus, you're quite well. Nothing simpler. Science is always simple and always profound. It is only the half-truths that are dangerous. Ignorant faddists pick up some superficial information about germs; and they write to the papers and try to discredit science. They dupe and mislead many honest and worthy people. But science has a perfect answer to them on every point.

A little learning is a dangerous thing:
Drink deep; or taste not the Pierian spring.

I mean no disrespect to your generation, Sir Patrick: some of you old stagers did marvels through sheer professional intuition and clinical experience; but when I think of the average men of your day, ignorantly bleeding and cupping and purging, and scattering germs over their patients from their clothes and instruments, and contrast all that with the scientific certainty and simplicity of my treatment of the little prince the other day, I can't help being proud of my own generation: the men who were trained on the germ theory, the veterans of the great struggle over Evolution in the seventies. We may have our faults; but at least we are men of science. That is why I am taking up your treatment, Ridgeon, and pushing it. It's scientific. *[He sits down on the chair near the couch.]*

EMMY *[at the door, announcing]*. Dr Blenkinsop.

[DR BLENKINSOP is in very different case from the others. He is clearly not a prosperous man. He is flabby and shabby, cheaply fed and cheaply clothed. He has the lines made by a conscience between his eyes, and the lines made by continual money worries all over his face, cut all the deeper as he has seen better days, and hails his well-to-do colleagues as their contemporary and old hospital friend, though even in this he has to struggle with the diffidence of poverty and relegation to the poorer middle class.]

RIDGEON. How are you, Blenkinsop?

BLENKINSOP. I've come to offer my humble congratulations. Oh dear! all the great guns are before me.

B. B. *[patronizing, but charming]*. How d'ye do, Blenkinsop? How d'ye do?

BLENKINSOP. And Sir Patrick, too! *[SIR PATRICK grunts.]*

RIDGEON. You've met Walpole, of course?

WALPOLE. How d'ye do?

BLENKINSOP. It's the first time I've had that honor. In my poor little practice there are no chances of meeting you great men. I know nobody but the St Anne's men of my own day. *[To RIDGEON.]* And so you're Sir Colenso. How does it feel?

RIDGEON. Foolish at first. Don't take any notice of it.

BLENKINSOP. I'm ashamed to say I haven't a notion what your great discovery is; but I congratulate you all the same for the sake of old times.

B. B. *[shocked]*. But, my dear Blenkinsop, you used to be rather keen on science.

BLENKINSOP. Ah, I used to be a lot of things. I used to have two or three

decent suits of clothes, and flannels to go up the river on Sundays. Look at me now: this is my best; and it must last til Christmas. What can I do? Ive never opened a book since I was qualified thirty years ago. I used to read the medical papers at first; but you know how soon a man drops that; besides, I cant afford them; and what are they after all but trade papers, full of advertisements? Ive forgotten all my science: whats the use of my pretending I havnt? But I have great experience: clinical experience; and bedside experience is the main thing, isnt it?

B. B. No doubt; always provided, mind you, that you have a sound scientific theory to correlate your observations at the bedside. Mere experience by itself is nothing. If I take my dog to the bedside with me, he sees what I see. But he learns nothing from it. Why? Because he's not a scientific dog.

WALPOLE. It amuses me to hear you physicians and general practitioners talking about clinical experience. What do you see at the bedside but the outside of the patient? Well: it isnt his outside thats wrong, except perhaps in skin cases. What you want is a daily familiarity with people's insides; and that you can only get at the operating table. I know what I'm talking about: Ive been a surgeon and a consultant for twenty years; and Ive never known a general practitioner right in his diagnosis yet. Bring them a perfectly simple case; and they diagnose cancer, and arthritis, and appendicitis, and every other itis, when any really experienced surgeon can see that it's a plain case of blood-poisoning.

BLENKINSOP. Ah, it's easy for you gentlemen to talk; but what would you say if you had my practice? Except for the workmen's clubs, my patients are all clerks and shopmen. They darent be ill: they cant afford it. And when they break down, what can I do for them? You can send your people to St. Moritz or to Egypt, or recommend horse exercise or motoring or champagne jelly or complete change and rest for six months. I might as well order my people a slice of the moon. And the worst of it is, I'm too poor to keep well myself on the cooking I have to put up with. Ive such a wretched digestion; and I look it. How am I to inspire confidence? [*He sits down disconsolately on the couch.*]

RIDGEON [*restlessly*]. Dont, Blenkinsop: it's too painful. The most tragic thing in the world is a sick doctor.

WALPOLE. Yes, by George: it's like a bald-headed man trying to sell a hair restorer. Thank God I'm a surgeon!

B. B. [*sunnilly*]. I am never sick. Never had a day's illness in my life. Thats what enables me to sympathize with my patients.

WALPOLE [*interested*]. What! youre never ill!

B. B. Never.

WALPOLE. Thats interesting. I believe you have no nuciform sac. If you ever do feel at all queer, I should very much like to have a look.

B. B. Thank you, my dear fellow; but I'm too busy just now.

RIDGEON. I was just telling them when you came in, Blenkinsop, that I have worked myself out of sorts.

BLENKINSOP. Well, it seems presumptuous of me to offer a prescription to a great man like you; but still I have great experience; and if I might recommend a pound of ripe greengages every day half an hour before lunch, I'm sure youd find a benefit. Theyre very cheap.

RIDGEON. What do you say to that, B. B.?

B. B. [*encouragingly*]. Very sensible, Blenkinsop: very sensible indeed. I'm delighted to see that you disapprove of drugs.

SIR PATRICK [*grunts*]!

B. B. [*archly*]. Aha! Haha! Did I hear from the fireside armchair the bow-wow of the old school defending its drugs? Ah, believe me, Paddy, the world would be healthier if every chemist's shop in England were demolished. Look at the papers! full of scandalous advertisements of patent medicines! a huge commercial system of quackery and poison. Well, whose fault is it? Ours. I say, ours. We set the example. We spread the superstition. We taught the people to believe in bottles of doctor's stuff; and now they buy it at the stores instead of consulting a medical man.

WALPOLE. Quite true. I've not prescribed a drug for the last fifteen years.

B. B. Drugs can only repress symptoms: they cannot eradicate disease. The true remedy for all diseases is Nature's remedy. Nature and Science are at one, Sir Patrick, believe me; though you were taught differently. Nature has provided, in the white corpuscles as you call them—in the phagocytes as we call them—a natural means of devouring and destroying all disease germs. There is at bottom only one genuinely scientific treatment for all diseases, and that is to stimulate the phagocytes. Stimulate the phagocytes. Drugs are a delusion. Find the germ of the disease; prepare from it a suitable anti-toxin; inject it three times a day quarter of an hour before meals; and what is the result? The phagocytes are stimulated; they devour the disease; and the patient recovers—unless, of course, he's too far gone. That, I take it, is the essence of Ridgeon's discovery.

SIR PATRICK [*dreamily*]. As I sit here, I seem to hear my poor old father talking again.

B. B. [*rising in incredulous amazement*]. Your father! But Lord bless my soul, Paddy, your father must have been an older man than you.

SIR PATRICK. Word for word almost, he said what you say. No more drugs. Nothing but inoculation.

B. B. [*almost contemptuously*]. Inoculation! Do you mean smallpox inoculation?

SIR PATRICK. Yes. In the privacy of our family circle, sir, my father used to declare his belief that smallpox inoculation was good, not only for smallpox, but for all fevers.

B. B. [*suddenly rising to the new idea with immense interest and excitement*]. What! Ridgeon: did you hear that? Sir Patrick: I am more struck by what you have just told me than I can well express. Your father, sir, anticipated a discovery of my own. Listen, Walpole. Blenkinsop: attend one moment. You will all be intensely interested in this. I was put on the track by accident. I had a typhoid case and a tetanus case side by side in the hospital: a beadle and a city missionary. Think of what that meant for them, poor fellows! Can a beadle be dignified with typhoid? Can a missionary be eloquent with lockjaw? No. NO. Well, I got some typhoid anti-toxin from Ridgeon and a tube of Muldooley's anti-tetanus serum. But the missionary jerked all my things off the table in one of his paroxysms; and in replacing them I put Ridgeon's tube where Muldooley's ought to have been. The consequence was that I inoculated the typhoid case for tetanus and the tetanus case for typhoid. [*The doctors look greatly concerned. B. B., undamped, smiles triumphantly.*] Well, they recovered. THEY RECOVERED. Except for a touch

of St. Vitus's dance the missionary's as well today as ever; and the beadle's ten times the man he was.

BLENKINSOP. I've known things like that happen. They cant be explained.

B. B. [*severely*]. Blenkinsop: there is nothing that cannot be explained by science. What did I do? Did I fold my hands helplessly and say that the case could not be explained? By no means. I sat down and used my brains. I thought the case out on scientific principles. I asked myself why didnt the missionary die of typhoid on top of tetanus, and the beadle of tetanus on top of typhoid? Theres a problem for you, Ridgeon. Think, Sir Patrick. Reflect, Blenkinsop. Look at it without prejudice, Walpole. What is the real work of the anti-toxin? Simply to stimulate the phagocytes. Very well. But so long as you stimulate the phagocytes, what does it matter which particular sort of serum you use for the purpose? Haha! Eh? Do you see? Do you grasp it? Ever since that I've used all sorts of anti-toxins absolutely indiscriminately, with perfectly satisfactory results. I inoculated the little prince with your stuff, Ridgeon, because I wanted to give you a lift; but two years ago I tried the experiment of treating a scarlet fever case with a sample of hydrophobia serum from the Pasteur Institute, and it answered capitally. It stimulated the phagocytes; and the phagocytes did the rest. That is why Sir Patrick's father found that inoculation cured all fevers. It stimulated the phagocytes. [*He throws himself into his chair, exhausted with the triumph of his demonstration, and beams magnificently on them.*]

EMMY [*looking in*]. Mr Walpole: your motor's come for you; and it's frightening Sir Patrick's horses; so come along quick.

WALPOLE [*rising*]. Goodbye, Ridgeon.

RIDGEON. Goodbye; and many thanks.

B. B. You see my point, Walpole?

EMMY. He cant wait, Sir Ralph. The carriage will be into the area if he dont come.

WALPOLE. I'm coming. [*To B. B.*] Theres nothing in your point. Phagocytosis is pure rot: the cases are all blood-poisoning; and the knife is the real remedy. Bye-bye, Sir Paddy. Happy to have met you, Mr Blenkinsop. Now, Emmy. [*He goes out, followed by EMMY.*]

B. B. [*sadly*]. Walpole has no intellect. A mere surgeon. Wonderful operator; but, after all, what is operating? Only manual labor. Brain—BRAIN remains master of the situation. The nuciform sac is utter nonsense: theres no such organ. It's a mere accidental kink in the membrane occurring in perhaps two-and-a-half per cent of the population. Of course I'm glad for Walpole's sake that the operation is fashionable; for he's a dear good fellow; and after all, as I always tell people, the operation will do them no harm: indeed, I've known the nervous shake-up and the fortnight in bed do people a lot of good after a hard London season; but still it's a shocking fraud. [*Rising.*] Well, I must be toddling. Goodbye, Paddy [*SIR PATRICK grunts.*] goodbye, goodbye. Goodbye, my dear Blenkinsop, goodbye! Goodbye, Ridgeon. Dont fret about your health: you know what to do: if your liver is sluggish, a little mercury never does any harm. If you feel restless, try bromide. If that doesnt answer, a stimulant, you know: a little phosphorus and strychnine. If you cant sleep, trional trional, trion—

SIR PATRICK [*dryly*]. But no drugs, Colly, remember that.

B. B. [*firmly*]. Certainly not. Quite right, Sir Patrick. As temporary ex-

pedients, of course; but as treatment, no, NO. Keep away from the chemist's shop, my dear Ridgeon, whatever you do.

RIDGEON [*going to the door with him*]. I will. And thank you for the knight-hood. Goodbye.

B. B. [*stopping at the door, with the beam in his eye twinkling a little*]. By the way, who's your patient?

RIDGEON. Who?

B. B. Downstairs. Charming woman. Tuberculous husband.

RIDGEON. Is she there still?

EMMY [*looking in*]. Come on, Sir Ralph: your wife's waiting in the carriage.

B. B. [*suddenly sobered*]. Oh! Goodbye. [*He goes out almost precipitately.*]

RIDGEON. Emmy: is that woman there still? If so, tell her once for all that I cant and wont see her. Do you hear?

EMMY. Oh, she aint in a hurry: she doesnt mind how long she waits. [*She goes out.*]

BLINKINSOP. I must be off, too: every half-hour I spend away from my work costs me eighteenpence. Goodbye, Sir Patrick.

SIR PATRICK. Goodbye. Goodbye.

RIDGEON. Come to lunch with me some day this week.

BLINKINSOP. I cant afford it, dear boy; and it would put me off my own food for a week. Thank you all the same.

RIDGEON [*uneasy at BLINKINSOP's poverty*]. Can I do nothing for you?

BLINKINSOP. Well, if you have an old frock-coat to spare? you see what would be an old one for you would be a new one for me; so remember me the next time you turn out your wardrobe. Goodbye. [*He hurries out.*]

RIDGEON [*looking after him*]. Poor chap. [*Turning to SIR PATRICK.*] So thats why they made me a knight! And thats the medical profession!

SIR PATRICK. And a very good profession, too, my lad. When you know as much as I know of the ignorance and superstition of the patients, youll wonder that we're half as good as we are.

RIDGEON. We're not a profession: we're a conspiracy.

SIR PATRICK. All professions are conspiracies against the laity. And we cant all be geniuses like you. Every fool can get ill; but every fool cant be a good doctor: there are not enough good ones to go round. And for all you know, Bloomfield Bonington kills less people than you do.

RIDGEON. Oh, very likely. But he really ought to know the difference between a vaccine and an anti-toxin. Stimulate the phagocytes! The vaccine doesnt affect the phagocytes at all. He's all wrong: hopelessly, dangerously wrong. To put a tube of serum into his hands is murder: simple murder.

EMMY [*returning*]. Now, Sir Patrick. How long more are you going to keep them horses standing in the draught?

SIR PATRICK. Whats that to you, you old catamaran?

EMMY. Come, come, now! none of your temper to me. And it's time for Colly to get to his work.

RIDGEON. Behave yourself, Emmy. Get out.

EMMY. Oh, I learnt how to behave myself before I learnt you to do it. I know what doctors are: sitting talking together about themselves when they

ought to be with their poor patients. And I know what horses are, Sir Patrick. I was brought up in the country. Now be good; and come along.

SIR PATRICK *[rising]*. Very well, very well, very well. Goodbye, Colly. *[He pats RIDGEON on the shoulder and goes out, turning for a moment at the door to look meditatively at EMMY and say, with grave conviction:]* You are an ugly old devil, and no mistake.

EMMY *[highly indignant, calling after him]*. You're no beauty yourself. *[To RIDGEON, much flustered]*. They've no manners: they think they can say what they like to me; and you set them on, you do. I'll teach them their places. Here now: are you going to see that poor thing or are you not?

RIDGEON. I tell you for the fiftieth time I won't see anybody. Send her away.

EMMY. Oh, I'm tired of being told to send her away. What good will that do her?

RIDGEON. Must I get angry with you, Emmy?

EMMY *[coaxing]*. Come now: just see her for a minute to please me: there's a good boy. She's given me half-a-crown. She thinks it's life and death to her husband for her to see you.

RIDGEON. Values her husband's life at half-a-crown!

EMMY. Well, it's all she can afford, poor lamb. Them others think nothing of half-a-sovereign just to talk about themselves to you, the sluts! Besides, she'll put you in a good temper for the day, because it's a good deed to see her; and she's the sort that gets around you.

RIDGEON. Well, she hasn't done so badly. For half-a-crown she's had a consultation with Sir Ralph Bloomfield Bonington and Cutler Walpole. That's six guineas' worth to start with. I daresay she's consulted Blenkinsop too: that's another eighteenpence.

EMMY. Then you'll see her for me, won't you?

RIDGEON. Oh, send her up and be hanged. *[EMMY trots out, satisfied.]*
RIDGEON *calls:* Redpenny!

REDPENNY *[appearing at the door]*. What is it?

RIDGEON. There's a patient coming up. If she hasn't gone in five minutes, come in with an urgent call from the hospital for me. You understand; she's to have a strong hint to go.

REDPENNY. Right O! *[He vanishes.]*

[RIDGEON goes to the glass, and arranges his tie a little.]

EMMY *[announcing]*. Mrs Doobidad *[RIDGEON leaves the glass and goes to the writing-table.]*

[The Lady comes in. EMMY goes out and shuts the door. RIDGEON, who has put on an impenetrable and rather distant professional manner, turns to the lady, and invites her, by a gesture, to sit down on the couch.]

MRS DUBEDAT is beyond all demur an arrestingly good-looking young woman. She has something of the grace and romance of a wild creature, with a good deal of the elegance and dignity of a fine lady. RIDGEON, who is extremely susceptible to the beauty of women, instinctively assumes the defensive at once, and hardens his manner still more. He has an impression that she is very well dressed; but she has a figure on which any dress would look well, and carries herself with the unaffected distinction of a woman who has never in her life suffered from those doubts and fears as to her social position which spoil the manners of most middling people. She is tall, slender, and strong; has dark hair, dressed so as to look

like hair and not like a bird's nest or a pantaloons wig (fashion wavering just then between these two models); has unexpected narrow, subtle, dark-fringed eyes that alter her expression disturbingly when she is excited and flashes them wide open; is softly impetuous in her speech and swift in her movements; and is just now in mortal anxiety. She carries a portfolio.]

MRS DUBEDAT [*in low urgent tones*]. Doctor—

RIDGEON [*curtly*]. Wait. Before you begin, let me tell you at once that I can do nothing for you. My hands are full. I sent you that message by my old servant. You would not take that answer.

MRS DUBEDAT. How could I?

RIDGEON. You bribed her.

MRS DUBEDAT. I—

RIDGEON. That doesnt matter. She coaxed me to see you. Well, you must take it from me now that with all the good will in the world, I cannot undertake another case.

MRS DUBEDAT. Doctor: you must save my husband. You must. When I explain to you, you will see that you must. It is not an ordinary case, not like any other case. He is not like anybody else in the world: oh, believe me, he is not. I can prove it to you: [*Fingering her portfolio.*] I have brought some things to shew you. And you can save him: the papers say you can.

RIDGEON. Whats the matter? Tuberculosis?

MRS DUBEDAT. Yes. His left lung—

RIDGEON. Yes: you neednt tell me about that.

MRS DUBEDAT. You can cure him, if only you will. It is true that you can, isnt it? [*In great distress.*] Oh, tell me, please.

RIDGEON [*warningly*]. You are going to be quiet and self-possessed, arnt you?

MRS DUBEDAT. Yes. I beg your pardon. I know I shouldnt—[*Giving way again.*] Oh, please, say that you can; and then I shall be all right.

RIDGEON [*huffily*]. I am not a curemonger: if you want cures, you must go to the people who sell them. [*Recovering himself, ashamed of the tone of his own voice.*] But I have at the hospital ten tuberculosis patients whose lives I believe I can save.

MRS DUBEDAT. Thank God!

RIDGEON. Wait a moment. Try to think of those ten patients as ten shipwrecked men on a raft—a raft that is barely large enough to save them—that will not support one more. Another head bobs up through the waves at the side. Another man begs to be taken aboard. He implores the captain of the raft to save him. But the captain can only do that by pushing one of his ten off the raft and drowning him to make room for the new comer. That is what you are asking me to do.

MRS DUBEDAT. But how can that be? I dont understand. Surely—

RIDGEON. You must take my word for it that it is so. My laboratory, my staff, and myself are working at full pressure. We are doing our utmost. The treatment is a new one. It takes time, means, and skill; and there is not enough for another case. Our ten cases are already chosen cases. Do you understand what I mean by chosen?

MRS DUBEDAT. Chosen. No: I cant understand.

RIDGEON [*sternly*]. You must understand. Youve got to understand and to

face it. In every single one of those ten cases I have had to consider, not only whether the man could be saved, but whether he was worth saving. There were fifty cases to choose from; and forty had to be condemned to death. Some of the forty had young wives and helpless children. If the hardness of their cases could have saved them they would have been saved ten times over. I've no doubt your case is a hard one: I can see the tears in your eyes [*She hastily wipes her eyes.*]: I know that you have a torrent of entreaties ready for me the moment I stop speaking; but it's no use. You must go to another doctor.

MRS DUBEDAT. But can you give me the name of another doctor who understands your secret?

RIDGEON. I have no secret; I am not a quack.

MRS DUBEDAT. I beg your pardon: I didn't mean to say anything wrong. I don't understand how to speak to you. Oh, pray don't be offended.

RIDGEON [*again a little ashamed*]. There! there! never mind. [*He relaxes and sits down.*] After all, I'm talking nonsense: I daresay I am a quack, a quack with a qualification. But my discovery is not patented.

MRS DUBEDAT. Then can any doctor cure my husband? Oh, why don't they do it? I have tried so many: I have spent so much. If only you would give me the name of another doctor.

RIDGEON. Every man in this street is a doctor. But outside myself and the handful of men I am training at St Anne's, there is nobody as yet who has mastered the opsonin treatment. And we are full up. I'm sorry; but that is all I can say. [*Rising.*] Good morning.

MRS DUBEDAT [*suddenly and desperately taking some drawings from her portfolio*]. Doctor: look at these. You understand drawings: you have good ones in your waiting room. Look at them. They are his work.

RIDGEON. It's no use my looking. [*He looks, all the same.*] Hallo! [*He takes one to the window and studies it.*] Yes: this is the real thing. Yes, yes. [*He looks at another and returns to her.*] These are very clever. They're unfinished, aren't they?

MRS DUBEDAT. He gets tired so soon. But you see, don't you, what a genius he is? You see that he is worth saving. Oh, doctor, I married him just to help him to begin: I had money enough to tide him over the hard years at the beginning—to enable him to follow his inspiration until his genius was recognized. And I was useful to him as a model: his drawings of me sold quite quickly.

RIDGEON. Have you got one?

MRS DUBEDAT [*producing another*]. Only this one. It was the first.

RIDGEON [*devouring it with his eyes*]. That's a wonderful drawing. Why is it called Jennifer?

MRS DUBEDAT. My name is Jennifer.

RIDGEON. A strange name.

MRS DUBEDAT. Not in Cornwall. I am Cornish. It's only what you call Guinevere.

RIDGEON [*repeating the names with a certain pleasure in them*]. Guinevere. Jennifer. [*Looking again at the drawing.*] Yes: it's really a wonderful drawing. Excuse me; but may I ask is it for sale? I'll buy it.

MRS DUBEDAT. Oh, take it. It's my own: he gave it to me. Take it. Take them all. Take everything; ask anything; but save him. You can: you will: you must.

REDPENNY [*entering with every sign of alarm*]. Theyve just telephoned from the hospital that youre to come instantly—a patient on the point of death. The carriage is waiting.

RIDGEON [*intolerantly*]. Oh, nonsense: get out. [*Greatly annoyed.*] What do you mean by interrupting me like this?

REDPENNY. But—

RIDGEON. Chut! cant you see I'm engaged? Be off.

[REDPENNY, *bewildered, vanishes.*]

MRS DUBEDAT [*rising*]. Doctor: one instant only before you go—

RIDGEON. Sit down. It's nothing.

MRS DUBEDAT. But the patient. He said he was dying.

RIDGEON. Oh, he's dead by this time. Never mind. Sit down.

MRS DUBEDAT [*sitting down and breaking down*]. Oh, you none of you care. You see people die every day.

RIDGEON [*petting her*]. Nonsense! it's nothing: I told him to come in and say that. I thought I should want to get rid of you.

MRS DUBEDAT [*shocked at the falsehood*]. Oh!

RIDGEON [*continuing*]. Dont look so bewildered: theres nobody dying.

MRS DUBEDAT. My husband is.

RIDGEON [*pulling himself together*]. Ah, yes: I had forgotten your husband. Mrs Dubedat: you are asking me to do a very serious thing?

MRS DUBEDAT. I am asking you to save the life of a great man.

RIDGEON. You are asking me to kill another man for his sake; for as surely as I undertake another case, I shall have to hand back one of the old ones to the ordinary treatment. Well, I dont shrink from that. I have had to do it before; and I will do it again if you can convince me that his life is more important than the worst life I am now saving. But you must convince me first.

MRS DUBEDAT. He made those drawings; and they are not the best—nothing like the best; only I did not bring the really best: so few people like them. He is twenty-three: his whole life is before him. Wont you let me bring him to you? wont you speak to him? wont you see for yourself?

RIDGEON. Is he well enough to come to a dinner at the Star and Garter at Richmond?

MRS DUBEDAT. Oh yes. Why?

RIDGEON. I'll tell you. I am inviting all my old friends to a dinner to celebrate my knighthood—youve seen about it in the papers, havnt you?

MRS DUBEDAT. Yes, oh yes. That was how I found out about you.

RIDGEON. It will be a doctors' dinner; and it was to have been a bachelors' dinner. I'm a bachelor. Now if you will entertain for me, and bring your husband, he will meet me, and he will meet some of the most eminent men in my profession: Sir Patrick Cullen, Sir Ralph Bloomfield Bonington, Cutler Walpole, and others. I can put the case to them; and your husband will have to stand or fall by what we think of him. Will you come?

MRS DUBEDAT. Yes, of course I will come. Oh, thank you, thank you. And may I bring some of his drawings—the really good ones?

RIDGEON. Yes. I will let you know the date in the course of tomorrow. Leave me your address.

MRS DUBEDAT. Thank you again and again. You have made me so happy:

I know you will admire me and like him. This is my address. [*She gives him her card.*]

RIDGEON. Thank you. [*He rings.*]

MRS DUBEDAT [*embarrassed*]. May I—is there—should I—I mean—[*She blushes and stops in confusion.*]

RIDGEON. Whats the matter?

MRS DUBEDAT. Your fee for this consultation?

RIDGEON. Oh, I forgot that. Shall we say a beautiful drawing of his favorite model for the whole treatment, including the cure?

MRS DUBEDAT. You are very generous. Thank you. I know you will cure him. Goodbye.

RIDGEON. I will. Goodbye. [*They shake hands.*] By the way, you know, dont you, that tuberculosis is catching. You take every precaution, I hope.

MRS DUBEDAT. I am not likely to forget it. They treat us like lepers at the hotels.

EMMY [*at the door*]. Well, deary: have you got round him?

RIDGEON. Yes. Attend to the door and hold your tongue.

EMMY. Thats a good boy. [*She goes out with MRS DUBEDAT.*]

RIDGEON [*alone*]. Consultation free. Cure guaranteed. [*He heaves a great sigh.*]

ACT II

After dinner on the terrace at the Star and Garter, Richmond. Cloudless summer night; nothing disturbs the stillness except from time to time the long trajectory of a distant train and the measured clucking of oars coming up from the Thames in the valley below. The dinner is over; and three of the eight chairs are empty. SIR PATRICK, with his back to the view, is at the head of the square table with RIDGEON. The two chairs opposite them are empty. On their right come, first, a vacant chair, and then one very fully occupied by B. B., who basks blissfully in the moonbeams. On their left, SCHUTZMACHER and WALPOLE. The entrance to the hotel is on their right, behind B. B. The five men are silently enjoying their coffee and cigarettes, full of food, and not altogether void of wine. . . . MRS DUBEDAT, wrapped for departure, comes in. They rise, except SIR PATRICK; but she takes one of the vacant places at the foot of the table, next B. B.; and they sit down again.

MRS DUBEDAT [*as she enters*]. Louis will be here presently. He is shewing Dr Blenkinsop how to work the telephone. [*She sits.*] Oh, I am so sorry we have to go. It seems such a shame, this beautiful night. And we have enjoyed ourselves so much.

RIDGEON. I dont believe another half-hour would do Mr Dubedat a bit of harm.

SIR PATRICK. Come now, Colly, come! come! none of that. You take your man home, Mrs Dubedat; and get him to bed before eleven.

B. B. Yes, yes. Bed before eleven. Quite right, quite right. Sorry to lose you, my dear lady; but Sir Patrick's orders are the laws of—er—of Tyre and Sidon.

WALPOLE. Let me take you home in my motor.

SIR PATRICK. No. You ought to be ashamed of yourself, Walpole. Your motor will take Mr and Mrs Dubedat to the station, and quite far enough too for an open carriage at night.

MRS DUBEDAT. Oh, I am sure the train is best.

RIDGEON. Well, Mrs Dubedat, we have had a most enjoyable evening.

WALPOLE. } Most enjoyable.

B. B. } Delightful. Charming. Unforgettable.

MRS DUBEDAT [*with a touch of shy anxiety*]. What did you think of Louis? Or am I wrong to ask?

RIDGEON. Wrong! Why, we are all charmed with him.

WALPOLE. Delighted.

B. B. Most happy to have met him. A privilege, a real privilege.

SIR PATRICK [*grunts*]!

MRS DUBEDAT [*quickly*]. Sir Patrick: are you uneasy about him?

SIR PATRICK [*discreetly*]. I admire his drawings greatly, maam.

MRS DUBEDAT. Yes; but I meant—

RIDGEON. You shall go away quite happy. He's worth saving. He must and shall be saved.

[*MRS DUBEDAT rises and gasps with delight, relief, and gratitude. They all rise except SIR PATRICK and SCHUTZMACHER, and come reassuringly to her.*]

B. B. Certainly, certainly.

WALPOLE. There's no real difficulty, if only you know what to do.

MRS DUBEDAT. Oh, how can I ever thank you! From this night I can begin to be happy at last. You don't know what I feel.

[*She sits down in tears. They crowd about her to console her.*]

B. B. My dear lady: come come! come come! [*very persuasively*] come come!

WALPOLE. Don't mind us. Have a good cry.

RIDGEON. No: don't cry. Your husband had better not know that we've been talking about him.

MRS DUBEDAT [*quickly pulling herself together*]. No, of course not. Please don't mind me. What a glorious thing it must be to be a doctor! [*They laugh.*] Don't laugh. You don't know what you've done for me. I never knew until now how deadly afraid I was—how I had come to dread the worst. I never dared let myself know. But now the relief has come: now I know.

[*LOUIS DUBEDAT comes from the hotel, in his overcoat, his throat wrapped in a shawl. He is a slim young man of 23, physically still a stripling, and pretty, though not effeminate. He has turquoise blue eyes, and a trick of looking you straight in the face with them, which, combined with a frank smile, is very engaging. Although he is all nerves, and very observant and quick of apprehension, he is not in the least shy. He is younger than JENNIFER; but he patronizes her as a matter of course. The doctors do not put him out in the least: neither SIR PATRICK's years nor BLOOMFIELD BONINGTON's majesty have the smallest apparent effect on him: he is as natural as a cat: he moves among men as most men move among things, though he is intentionally making himself agreeable to them on this occasion. Like all people who can be depended on to take care of themselves, he is welcome company; and his artist's power of appealing to the imagination gains him credit for all sorts of qualities and powers, whether he possesses them or not.*]

LOUIS [*pulling on his gloves behind RIDGEON's chair*]. Now, Jinny-Gwinny: the motor has come round.

RIDGEON. Why do you let him spoil your beautiful name like that, Mrs Dubedat?

MRS DUBEDAT. Oh, on grand occasions I am Jennifer.

B. B. You are a bachelor: you do not understand these things, Ridgeon. Look at me. [*They look.*] I also have two names. In moments of domestic worry, I am simple Ralph. When the sun shines in the home, I am Beedle-Deedle-Dumkins. Such is married life! Mr Dubedat: may I ask you to do me a favor before you go. Will you sign your name to this menu card, under the sketch you have made of me?

WALPOLE. Yes; and mine too, if you will be so good.

LOUIS. Certainly. [*He sits down and signs the cards.*]

MRS DUBEDAT. Wont you sign Dr Schutzmacher's for him, Louis?

LOUIS. I dont think Dr Schutzmacher is pleased with his portrait. I'll tear it up. [*He reaches across the table for SCHUTZMACHER's menu card, and is about to tear it. SCHUTZMACHER makes no sign.*]

RIDGEON. No, no: if Loony doesnt want it, I do.

LOUIS. I'll sign it for you with pleasure. [*He signs and hands it to RIDGEON.*] Ive just been making a little note of the river tonight: it will work up into something good. [*He shews a pocket sketch-book.*] I think I'll call it the Silver Danube.

B. B. Ah, charming, charming.

WALPOLE. Very sweet. Youre a nailer at pastel.

[LOUIS coughs, first out of modesty, then from tuberculosis.]

SIR PATRICK. Now then, Mr Dubedat: youve had enough of the night air. Take him home, maam.

MRS DUBEDAT. Yes. Come, Louis.

RIDGEON. Never fear. Never mind. I'll make that cough all right.

B. B. We will stimulate the phagocytes. [*With tender effusion, shaking her hand.*] Goodnight, Mrs Dubedat. Goodnight. Goodnight.

WALPOLE. If the phagocytes fail, come to me. I'll put you right.

LOUIS. Goodnight, Sir Patrick. Happy to have met you.

SIR PATRICK. 'Night [*half a grunt*].

MRS DUBEDAT. Goodnight, Sir Patrick.

SIR PATRICK. Cover yourself well up. Dont think your lungs are made of iron because theyre better than his. Goodnight.

MRS DUBEDAT. Thank you. Thank you. Nothing hurts me. Goodnight.

[LOUIS goes out through the hotel without noticing SCHUTZMACHER. MRS DUBEDAT hesitates, then bows to him. SCHUTZMACHER rises and bows formally, German fashion. She goes out, attended by RIDGEON. The rest resume their seats, ruminating or smoking quietly.]

B. B. [*harmoniously*]. Dee-lightful couple! Charming woman! Gifted lad! Remarkable talent! Graceful outlines! Perfect evening! Great success! Interesting case! Glorious night! Exquisite scenery! Capital dinner! Stimulating conversation! Restful outing! Good wine! Happy ending! Touching gratitude! Lucky Ridgeon—

RIDGEON [*returning*]. Whats that? Calling me, B. B.? [*He goes back to his seat next SIR PATRICK.*]

B. B. No, no. Only congratulating you on a most successful evening! Enchanting woman! Thorough breeding! Gentle nature! Refined—

[BLENKINSOP comes from the hotel and takes the empty chair next RIDGEON.]

BLENKINSOP. I'm so sorry to have left you like this, Ridgeon; but it was a telephone message from the police. They've found half a milkman at our level crossing with a prescription of mine in its pocket. Wheres Mr Dubedat?

RIDGEON. Gone.

BLENKINSOP [*rising, very pale*]. Gone!

RIDGEON. Just this moment—

BLENKINSOP. Perhaps I could overtake him—[*he rushes into the hotel*].

WALPOLE [*calling after him*]. He's in the motor, man, miles off. You cant—[*giving it up*]. No use.

RIDGEON. They're really very nice people. I confess I was afraid the husband would turn out an appalling bounder. But he's almost as charming in his way as she is in hers. And there's no mistake about his being a genius. It's something to have got a case really worth saving. Somebody else will have to go; but at all events it will be easy to find a worse man.

SIR PATRICK. How do you know?

RIDGEON. Come now, Sir Paddy, no growling. Have something more to drink.

SIR PATRICK. No, thank you.

WALPOLE. Do you see anything wrong with Dubedat, B. B.?

B. B. Oh, a charming young fellow. Besides, after all, what could be wrong with him? Look at him. What could be wrong with him?

SIR PATRICK. There are two things that can be wrong with any man. One of them is a cheque. The other is a woman. Until you know that a man's sound on these two points, you know nothing about him.

B. B. Ah, cynic, cynic!

WALPOLE. He's all right as to the cheque, for a while at all events. He talked to me quite frankly before dinner as to the pressure of money difficulties on an artist. He says he has no vices and is very economical, but that there's one extravagance he can't afford and yet can't resist; and that is dressing his wife prettily. So I said, bang plump out, "Let me lend you twenty pounds, and pay me when your ship comes home." He was really very nice about it. He took it like a man; and it was a pleasure to see how happy it made him, poor chap.

B. B. [*who has listened to WALPOLE with growing perturbation*]. But—but—but—when was this, may I ask?

WALPOLE. When I joined you that time down by the river.

B. B. But, my dear Walpole, he had just borrowed ten pounds from me.

WALPOLE. What!

SIR PATRICK [*grunts*]!

B. B. [*indulgently*]. Well, well, it was really hardly borrowing; for he said heaven only knew when he could pay me. I couldn't refuse. It appears that Mrs Dubedat has taken a sort of fancy to me—

WALPOLE [*quickly*]. No: it was to me.

B. B. Certainly not. Your name was never mentioned between us. He is so wrapped up in his work that he has to leave her a good deal alone; and the poor innocent young fellow—he has of course no idea of my position or how busy I am—actually wanted me to call occasionally and talk to her.

WALPOLE. Exactly what he said to me!

B. B. Pooh! Pooh pooh! Really, I must say. [*Much disturbed, he rises and goes up to the balustrade, contemplating the landscape vexedly.*]

WALPOLE. Look here. Ridgeon! this is beginning to look serious.

[BLENKINSOP, *very anxious and wretched, but trying to look unconcerned, comes back.*]

RIDGEON. Well, did you catch him?

BLENKINSOP. No. Excuse my running away like that. [*He sits down at the foot of the table, next BLOOMFIELD BONINGTON's chair.*]

WALPOLE. Anything the matter?

BLENKINSOP. Oh no. A trifle—something ridiculous. It cant be helped. Never mind.

RIDGEON. Was it anything about Dubedat?

BLENKINSOP [*almost breaking down*]. I ought to keep it to myself, I know I cant tell you, Ridgeon, how ashamed I am of dragging my miserable poverty to your dinner after all your kindness. It's not that you wont ask me again; but it's so humiliating. And I did so look forward to one evening in my dress clothes (theyre still presentable, you see) with all my troubles left behind, just like old times.

RIDGEON. But what has happened?

BLENKINSOP. Oh, nothing. It's too ridiculous. I had just scraped up four shillings for this little outing; and it cost me one-and-fourpence to get here. Well, Dubedat asked me to lend him half-a-crown to tip the chambermaid of the room his wife left her wraps in, and for the cloakroom. He said he only wanted it for five minutes, as she had his purse. So of course I lent it to him. And he's forgotten to pay me. Ive just twopence to get back with.

RIDGEON. Oh, never mind that—

BLENKINSOP [*stopping him resolutely*]. No: I know what youre going to say; but I wont take it. Ive never borrowed a penny; and I never will. Ive nothing left but my friends; and I wont sell them. If none of you were to be able to meet me without being afraid that my civility was leading up to the loan of five shillings, there would be an end of everything for me. I'll take your old clothes, Colly, sooner than disgrace you by talking to you in the street in my own; but I wont borrow money. I'll train it as far as the twopence will take me; and I'll tramp the rest.

WALPOLE. Youll do the whole distance in my motor. [*They are all greatly relieved; and Walpole hastens to get away from the painful subject by adding*] Did he get anything out of you, Mr Schutzmacher?

SCHUTZMACHER [*shakes his head in a most expressive negative*].

WALPOLE. You didnt appreciate his drawing, I think.

SCHUTZMACHER. Oh yes I did. I should have liked very much to have kept the sketch and got it autographed.

B. B. But why didnt you?

SCHUTZMACHER. Well, the fact is, when I joined Dubedat after his conversation with Mr Walpole, he said that the Jews were the only people who knew anything about art, and that though he had to put up with your Philistine twaddle, as he called it, it was what I said about the drawings that really pleased him. He also said that his wife was greatly struck with my knowledge, and that

she always admired Jews. Then he asked me to advance him £50 on the security of the drawings.

B. B. WALPOLE BLENKINSOP SIR PATRICK	} [all exclaiming together]	{ No, no. Positively! Seriously! What! Another fifty! Think of that! [grunts]!
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SCHUTZMACHER. Of course I couldnt lend money to a stranger like that.

B. B. I envy you the power to say No, Mr Schutzmacher. Of course, I knew I oughtnt to lend money to a young fellow in that way; but I simply hadnt the nerve to refuse. I couldnt very well, you know, could I?

SCHUTZMACHER. I dont understand that. I felt that I couldnt very well lend it.

WALPOLE. What did he say?

SCHUTZMACHER. Well, he made a very uncalled-for remark about a Jew not understanding the feelings of a gentleman. I must say you Gentiles are very hard to please. You say we are no gentlemen when we lend money; and when we refuse to lend it you say just the same. I didnt mean to behave badly. As I told him, I might have lent it to him if he had been a Jew himself.

SIR PATRICK [*with a grunt*]. And what did he say to that?

SCHUTZMACHER. Oh, he began trying to persuade me that he was one of the chosen people—that his artistic faculty shewed it, and that his name was as foreign as my own. He said he didnt really want £50; that he was only joking; that all he wanted was a couple of sovereigns.

B. B. No, no, Mr Schutzmacher. You invented that last touch. Seriously, now?

SCHUTZMACHER. No. You cant improve on Nature in telling stories about gentlemen like Mr Dubedat.

BLENKINSOP. You certainly do stand by one another, you chosen people, Mr Schutzmacher.

SCHUTZMACHER. Not at all. Personally, I like Englishmen better than Jews, and always associate with them. Thats only natural, because, as I am a Jew, theres nothing interesting in a Jew to me, whereas there is always something interesting and foreign in an Englishman. But in money matters it's quite different. You see, when an Englishman borrows, all he knows or cares is that he wants money; and he'll sign anything to get it, without in the least understanding it, or intending to carry out the agreement if it turns out badly for him. In fact, he thinks you a cad if you ask him to carry it out under such circumstances. Just like the Merchant of Venice, you know. But if a Jew makes an agreement, he means to keep it and expects you to keep it. If he wants money for a time, he borrows it and knows he must pay it at the end of the time. If he knows he cant pay, he begs it as a gift.

RIDGEON. Come, Loony! do you mean to say that Jews are never rogues and thieves?

SCHUTZMACHER. Oh, not at all. But I was not talking of criminals. I was comparing honest Englishmen with honest Jews.

[*One of the hotel maids, a pretty, fair-haired woman of about 25, comes from the hotel, rather furtively. She accosts RIDGEON.*]

THE MAID. I beg your pardon, sir—

RIDGEON. Eh?

THE MAID. I beg your pardon, sir. It's not about the hotel. I'm not allowed to be on the terrace; and I should be discharged if I were seen speaking to you, unless you were kind enough to say you called me to ask whether the motor has come back from the station yet.

WALPOLE. Has it?

THE MAID. Yes, sir.

RIDGEON. Well, what do you want?

THE MAID. Would you mind, sir, giving me the address of the gentleman that was with you at dinner?

RIDGEON [*sharply*]. Yes, of course I should mind very much. You have no right to ask.

THE MAID. Yes, sir, I know it looks like that. But what am I to do?

SIR PATRICK. Whats the matter with you?

THE MAID. Nothing, sir. I want the address: thats all.

B. B. You mean the young gentleman?

THE MAID. Yes, sir: that went to catch the train with the woman he brought with him.

RIDGEON. The woman! Do you mean the lady who dined here? the gentleman's wife?

THE MAID. Dont believe them, sir. She cant be his wife. I'm his wife.

B. B. } [*in amazed remonstrance*]. My good girl!

RIDGEON } You his wife!

WALPOLE } What! whats that? Oh, this is getting perfectly fascinating, Ridgeon.

THE MAID. I could run upstairs and get you my marriage lines in a minute, sir, if you doubt my word. He's Mr Louis Dubedat, isnt he?

RIDGEON. Yes.

THE MAID. Well, sir, you may believe me or not; but I'm the lawful Mrs Dubedat.

SIR PATRICK. And why arnt you living with your husband?

THE MAID. We couldnt afford it, sir. I had thirty pounds saved; and we spent it all on our honeymoon in three weeks, and a lot more that he borrowed. Then I had to go back into service, and he went to London to get work at his drawing; and he never wrote me a line or sent me an address. I never saw nor heard of him again until I caught sight of him from the window going off in the motor with that woman.

SIR PATRICK. Well, thats two wives to start with.

B. B. Now upon my soul I dont want to be uncharitable; but really I'm beginning to suspect that our young friend is rather careless.

SIR PATRICK. Beginning to think! How long will it take you, man, to find out that he's a damned young blackguard?

BLINKINSOP. Oh, thats severe, Sir Patrick, very severe. Of course it's bigamy; but still he's very young; and she's very pretty. Mr Walpole: may I sponge on you for another of those nice cigarets of yours? [*He changes his seat for the one next Walpole.*]

WALPOLE. Certainly. [*He feels in his pockets.*] Oh bother! Where—? [*Suddenly remembering.*] I say: I recollect now: I passed my cigaret case to Dubedat and he didnt return it. It was a gold one.

THE MAID. He didnt mean any harm: he never thinks about things like that, sir. I'll get it back for you, sir, if youll tell me where to find him.

RIDGEON. What am I to do? Shall I give her the address or not?

SIR PATRICK. Give her your own address; and then we'll see. [*To the maid.*] Youll have to be content with that for the present, my girl. [RIDGEON gives her his card.] Whats your name?

THE MAID. Minnie Tinwell, sir.

SIR PATRICK. Well, you write him a letter to care of this gentleman; and it will be sent on. Now be off with you.

THE MAID. Thank you, sir. I'm sure you wouldnt see me wronged. Thank you all, gentlemen; and excuse the liberty.

[*She goes into the hotel. They watch her in silence.*]

RIDGEON [*when she is gone*]. Do you realize, you chaps, that we have promised Mrs Dubedat to save this fellow's life?

BLINKINSOP. Whats the matter with him?

RIDGEON. Tuberculosis.

BLINKINSOP [*interested*]. And can you cure that?

RIDGEON. I believe so.

BLINKINSOP. Then I wish youd cure me. My right lung is touched, I'm sorry to say.

RIDGEON	}	[<i>all together</i>]	What! your lung is going!
B. B.			My dear Blenkinsop, what do you tell me? [<i>Full of concern for Blenkinsop, he comes back from the balustrade.</i>]
SIR PATRICK			Eh? Eh? whats that?
WALPOLE			Hullo! you mustnt neglect this, you know.

BLINKINSOP [*putting his fingers in his ears*]. No, no: it's no use. I know what youre going to say: Ive said it often to others. I cant afford to take care of myself; and theres an end of it. If a fortnight's holiday would save my life, I'd have to die. I shall get on as others have to get on. We cant all go to St Moritz or to Egypt, you know, Sir Ralph. Dont talk about it.

[*Embarrassed silence.*]

SIR PATRICK [*grunts and looks hard at Ridgeon*]!

SCHUTZMACHER [*looking at his watch and rising*]. I must go. It's been a very pleasant evening, Colly. You might let me have my portrait if you dont mind. I'll send Mr Dubedat that couple of sovereigns for it.

RIDGEON [*giving him the menu card*]. Oh dont do that, Loony. I dont think he'd like that.

SCHUTZMACHER. Well, of course I shant if you feel that way about it. But I dont think you understand Dubedat. However, perhaps thats because I'm a Jew. Goodnight, Dr Blenkinsop [*shaking hands*].

BLINKINSOP. Goodnight, sir—I mean—Goodnight.

SCHUTZMACHER [*waving his hand to the rest*]. Goodnight, everybody.

WALPOLE	}	Goodnight.
B. B.		
SIR PATRICK		
RIDGEON		

B. B. repeats the salutation several times, in varied musical tones. SCHUTZMACHER goes out.

SIR PATRICK. It's time for us all to move. [*He rises and comes between BLENKINSOP and WALPOLE. RIDGEON also rises.*] Mr Walpole: take Blenkinsop home; he's had enough of the open air cure for tonight. Have you a thick overcoat to wear in the motor, Dr Blenkinsop?

BLENKINSOP. Oh, they'll give me some brown paper in the hotel; and a few thicknesses of brown paper across the chest are better than any fur coat.

WALPOLE. Well, come along. Goodnight, Colly. You're coming with us, arnt you, B. B.?

B. B. Yes: I'm coming. [*WALPOLE and BLENKINSOP go into the hotel.*] Goodnight, my dear Ridgeon [*shaking hands affectionately*]. Dont let us lose sight of your interesting patient and his very charming wife. We must not judge him too hastily, you know. [*With unction.*] Gooooooooodnight, Paddy. Bless you, dear old chap. [*SIR PATRICK utters a formidable grunt. B. B. laughs and pats him indulgently on the shoulder.*] Goodnight. Goodnight. Goodnight. Goodnight. [*He goodnights himself into the hotel.*]

[*The others have meanwhile gone without ceremony. RIDGEON and SIR PATRICK are left alone together. RIDGEON, deep in thought, comes down to SIR PATRICK.*]

SIR PATRICK. Well, Mr Savior of Lives: which is it to be? that honest decent man Blenkinsop, or that rotten blackguard of an artist, eh?

RIDGEON. It's not an easy case to judge, is it? Blenkinsop's an honest decent man; but is he any use? Dubedat's a rotten blackguard; but he's a genuine source of pretty and pleasant and good things.

SIR PATRICK. What will he be a source of for that poor innocent wife of his, when she finds him out?

RIDGEON. Thats true. Her life will be a hell.

SIR PATRICK. And tell me this. Suppose you had this choice put before you: either to go through life and find all the pictures bad but all the men and women good, or to go through life and find all the pictures good and all the men and women rotten. Which would you choose?

RIDGEON. Thats a devilishly difficult question, Paddy. The pictures are so agreeable, and the good people so infernally disagreeable and mischievous, that I really cant undertake to say offhand which I should prefer to do without.

SIR PATRICK. Come come! none of your cleverness with me: I'm too old for it. Blenkinsop isnt that sort of good man; and you know it.

RIDGEON. It would be simpler if Blenkinsop could paint Dubedat's pictures.

SIR PATRICK. It would be simpler still if Dubedat had some of Blenkinsop's honesty. The world isnt going to be made simple for you, my lad: you must take it as it is. Youve to hold the scales between Blenkinsop and Dubedat. Hold them fairly.

RIDGEON. Well, I'll be as fair as I can. I'll put into one scale all the pounds Dubedat has borrowed, and into the other all the half-crowns that Blenkinsop hasnt borrowed.

SIR PATRICK. And you'll take out of Dubedat's scale all the faith he has destroyed and the honor he has lost, and you'll put into Blenkinsop's scale all the faith he has justified and the honor he has created.

RIDGEON. Come come, Paddy! none of your claptrap with me. I'm too sceptical for it. I'm not at all convinced that the world wouldnt be a better world if everybody behaved as Dubedat does than it is now that everybody behaves as Blenkinsop does.

SIR PATRICK. Then why dont you behave as Dubedat does?

RIDGEON. Ah, that beats me. Thats the experimental test. Still, it's a dilemma. It's a dilemma. You see, theres a complication we havnt mentioned.

SIR PATRICK. Whats that?

RIDGEON. Well, if I let Blenkinsop die, at least nobody can say I did it because I wanted to marry his widow.

SIR PATRICK. Eh! Whats that?

RIDGEON. Now if I let Dubedat die, I'll marry his widow.

SIR PATRICK. Perhaps she wont have you, you know.

RIDGEON [*with a self-assured shake of the head*]. I've a pretty good flair for that sort of thing. I know when a woman is interested in me. She is.

SIR PATRICK. Well, sometimes a man knows best; and sometimes he knows worst. Youd much better cure them both.

RIDGEON. I cant. I'm at my limit. I can squeeze in one more case, but not two. I must choose.

SIR PATRICK. Well, you must choose as if she didn't exist: thats clear.

RIDGEON. Is that clear to you? Mind: it's not clear to me. She troubles my judgment.

SIR PATRICK. To me, it's a plain choice between a man and a lot of pictures.

RIDGEON. It's easier to replace a dead man than a good picture.

SIR PATRICK. Colly: when you live in an age that runs to pictures and statues and plays and brass bands because its men and women are not good enough to comfort its poor aching soul, you should thank Providence that you belong to a profession which is a high and great profession because its business is to heal and mend men and women.

RIDGEON. In short, as a member of a high and great profession, I'm to kill my patient.

SIR PATRICK. Dont talk wicked nonsense. You cant kill him. But you can leave him in other hands.

RIDGEON. In B. B.'s, for instance: eh? [*Looking at him significantly.*]

SIR PATRICK [*demurely facing his look*]. Sir Ralph Bloomfield Bonington is a very eminent physician.

RIDGEON. He is.

SIR PATRICK. I'm going for my hat.

[*RIDGEON strikes the bell as SIR PATRICK makes for the hotel. A waiter comes.*]

RIDGEON [*to the waiter*]. My bill, please.

WAITER. Yes, sir.

[*He goes for it.*]

ACT III

In DUBEDAT's studio. Viewed from the large window the outer door is in the wall on the left at the near end. The door leading to the inner rooms is in the opposite wall, at the far end. The facing wall has neither window nor door. The plaster on all the walls is uncovered and undecorated, except by scrawlings of charcoal sketches and memoranda. There is a studio throne (a chair on a dais) a little to the left, opposite the inner door, and an easel to the right, opposite the

outer door, with a dilapidated chair at it. Near the easel and against the wall is a bare wooden table with bottles and jars of oil and medium, paint-smudged rags, tubes of color, brushes, charcoal, a small lay figure, a kettle and spirit-lamp, and other odds and ends. By the table is a sofa, littered with drawing blocks, sketch-books, loose sheets of paper, newspapers, books, and more smudged rags. Next the outer door is an umbrella and hat stand, occupied partly by LOUIS' hats and cloak and muffler, and partly by odds and ends of costumes. There is an old piano stool on the near side of this door. In the corner near the inner door is a little tea-table. A lay figure, in a cardinal's robe and hat, with an hour-glass in one hand and a scythe slung on its back, smiles with inane malice at LOUIS, who, in a milk-man's smock much smudged with colors, is painting a piece of brocade which he has draped about his wife. She is sitting on the throne, not interested in the painting, and appealing to him very anxiously about another matter.

MRS DUBEDAT. Promise.

LOUIS [*putting on a touch of paint with notable skill and care and answering quite perfunctorily*]. I promise, my darling.

MRS DUBEDAT. When you want money, you will always come to me.

LOUIS. But it's so sordid, dearest. I hate money. I can't keep always bothering you for money, money, money. That's what drives me sometimes to ask other people, though I hate doing it.

MRS DUBEDAT. It is far better to ask me, dear. It gives people a wrong idea of you.

LOUIS. But I want to spare your little fortune, and raise money on my own work. Don't be unhappy, love: I can easily earn enough to pay it all back. I shall have a one-man-show next season; and then there will be no more money troubles. [*Putting down his palette.*] There! I mustn't do any more on that until it's bone-dry; so you may come down.

MRS DUBEDAT [*throwing off the drapery as she steps down, and revealing a plain frock of tussore³ silk*]. But you have promised, remember, seriously and faithfully, never to borrow again until you have first asked me.

LOUIS. Seriously and faithfully. [*Embracing her.*] Ah, my love, how right you are! how much it means to me to have you by me to guard me against living too much in the skies. On my solemn oath, from this moment forth I will never borrow another penny.

MRS DUBEDAT [*delighted*]. Ah, that's right. Does his wicked worrying wife torment him and drag him down from the clouds. [*She kisses him.*] And now, dear, won't you finish those drawings for Maclean?

LOUIS. Oh, they don't matter. I've got nearly all the money from him in advance.

MRS DUBEDAT. But, dearest, that is just the reason why you should finish them. He asked me the other day whether you really intended to finish them.

LOUIS. Confound his impudence! What the devil does he take me for? Now that just destroys all my interest in the beastly job. I've a good mind to throw up the commission, and pay him back his money.

MRS DUBEDAT. We can't afford that, dear. You had better finish the draw-

³ An oriental silkworm that produces a brownish silk.

ings and have done with them. I think it is a mistake to accept money in advance.

LOUIS. But how are we to live?

MRS DUBEDAT. Well, Louis, it is getting hard enough as it is, now that they are all refusing to pay except on delivery.

LOUIS. Damn those fellows! they think of nothing and care for nothing but their wretched money.

MRS DUBEDAT. Still, if they pay us, they ought to have what they pay for.

LOUIS [*coaxing*]. There now: thats enough lecturing for today. Ive promised to be good, havnt I?

MRS DUBEDAT [*putting her arms round his neck*]. You know that I hate lecturing, and that I dont for a moment misunderstand you, dear, dont you?

LOUIS [*fondly*]. I know. I know. Im a wretch; and youre an angel. Oh, if only I were strong enough to work steadily, I'd make my darling's house a temple, and her shrine a chapel more beautiful than was ever imagined. I cant pass the shops without wrestling with the temptation to go in and order all the really good things they have for you.

MRS DUBEDAT. I want nothing but you, dear. [*She gives him a caress, to which he responds so passionately that she disengages herself.*] There! be good now: remember that the doctors are coming this morning. Isnt it extraordinarily kind of them, Louis, to insist on coming? all of them, to consult about you?

LOUIS [*coolly*]. Oh, I daresay they think it will be a feather in their cap to cure a rising artist. They wouldnt come if it didnt amuse them, anyhow. [*Someone knocks at the door.*] I say: it's not time yet, is it?

MRS DUBEDAT. No, not quite yet.

LOUIS [*opening the door and finding RIDGEON there*]. Hello, Ridgeon. Delighted to see you. Come in.

MRS DUBEDAT [*shaking hands*]. It's so good of you to come, doctor.

LOUIS. Excuse this place, wont you? It's only a studio, you know: theres no real convenience for living here. But we pig along somehow, thanks to Jennifer.

MRS DUBEDAT. Now I'll run away. Perhaps later on, when youre finished with Louis, I may come in and hear the verdict. [*RIDGEON bows rather constrainedly.*] Would you rather I didnt?

RIDGEON. Not at all. Not at all.

[*MRS DUBEDAT looks at him, a little puzzled by his formal manners; then goes into the inner room.*]

LOUIS [*flippantly*]. I say: dont look so grave. Theres nothing awful going to happen, is there?

RIDGEON. No.

LOUIS. Thats all right. Poor Jennifer has been looking forward to your visit more than you can imagine. She's taken quite a fancy to you, Ridgeon. The poor girl has nobody to talk to: I'm always painting. [*Taking up a sketch.*] Theres a little sketch I made of her yesterday.

RIDGEON. She shewed it to me a fortnight ago when she first called on me.

LOUIS [*quite unabashed*]. Oh! did she? Good Lord! how time does fly! I could have sworn I'd only just finished it. It's hard for her here, seeing me piling up drawings and nothing coming in for them. Of course I shall sell them next year fast enough, after my one-man-show; but while the grass grows the steed starves. I hate to have her coming to me for money, and having none to give her. But what can I do?

RIDGEON. I understood that Mrs Dubedat had some property of her own.

LOUIS. Oh yes, a little; but how could a man with any decency of feeling touch that? Suppose I did, what would she have to live on if I died? I'm not insured: cant afford the premiums. [*Picking out another drawing.*] How do you like that?

RIDGEON [*putting it aside*]. I have not come here today to look at your drawings. I have more serious and pressing business with you.

LOUIS. You want to sound my wretched lung. [*With impulsive candor.*] My dear Ridgeon: I'll be frank with you. Whats the matter in this house isnt lungs but bills. It doesnt matter about me; but Jennifer has actually to economize in the matter of food. Youve made us feel that we can treat you as a friend. Will you lend us a hundred and fifty pounds?

RIDGEON. No.

LOUIS [*surprised*]. Why not?

RIDGEON. I am not a rich man; and I want every penny I can spare and more for my researches.

LOUIS. You mean youd want the money back again.

RIDGEON. I presume people sometimes have that in view when they lend money.

LOUIS [*after a moment's reflection*]. Well, I can manage that for you. I'll give you a cheque—or see here: theres no reason why you shouldnt have your bit too: I'll give you a cheque for two hundred.

RIDGEON. Why not cash the cheque at once without troubling me?

LOUIS. Bless you! they wouldnt cash it: I'm overdrawn as it is. No: the way to work it is this. I'll postdate the cheque next October. In October Jennifer's dividends come in. Well, you present the cheque. It will be returned marked "refer to drawer" or some rubbish of that sort. Then you can take it to Jennifer, and hint that if the cheque isnt taken up at once I shall be put in prison. She'll pay you like a shot. Youll clear £50; and youll do me a real service; for I do want the money very badly, old chap, I assure you.

RIDGEON [*staring at him*]. You see no objection to the transaction; and you anticipate none from me!

LOUIS. Well, what objection can there be? It's quite safe. I can convince you about the dividends.

RIDGEON. I mean on the score of its being—shall I say dishonorable?

LOUIS. Well, of course I shouldnt suggest it if I didnt want the money.

RIDGEON. Indeed! Well, you will have to find some other means of getting it.

LOUIS. Do you mean that you refuse?

RIDGEON. Do I mean—! [*Letting his indignation loose.*] Of course I refuse, man. What do you take me for? How dare you make such a proposal to me?

LOUIS. Why not?

RIDGEON. Faugh! You would not understand me if I tried to explain. Now, once for all, I will not lend you a farthing. I should be glad to help your wife; but lending you money is no service to her.

LOUIS. Oh well, if youre in earnest about helping her, I'll tell you what you might do. You might get your patients to buy some of my things, or to give me a few portrait commissions.

RIDGEON. My patients call me in as a physician, not as a commercial traveller.

[A knock at the door. LOUIS goes unconcernedly to open it, pursuing the subject as he goes.]

LOUIS. But you must have great influence with them. You must know such lots of things about them—private things that they wouldnt like to have known. They wouldnt dare to refuse you.

RIDGEON [*exploding*]. Well, upon my—

[LOUIS opens the door, and admits SIR PATRICK, SIR RALPH, and WALPOLE.]

RIDGEON [*proceeding furiously*]. Walpole: Ive been here hardly ten minutes; and already he's tried to borrow £150 from me. Then he proposed that I should get the money for him by blackmailing his wife; and youve just interrupted him in the act of suggesting that I should blackmail my patients into sitting to him for their portraits.

LOUIS. Well, Ridgeon, if that is what you call being an honorable man! I spoke to you in confidence.

SIR PATRICK. We're all going to speak to you in confidence, young man.

WALPOLE [*hanging his hat on the only peg left vacant on the hat-stand*]. We shall make ourselves at home for half an hour, Dubedat. Dont be alarmed; youre a most fascinating chap; and we love you.

LOUIS. Oh, all right, all right. Sit down—anywhere you can. Take this chair, Sir Patrick [*indicating the one on the throne*]. Up-z-z-z! [*helping him up: SIR PATRICK grunts and enthrones himself*]. Here you are, B. B. [*SIR RALPH glares at the familiarity; but LOUIS, quite undisturbed puts a big book and a sofa cushion on the dais, on SIR PATRICK's right; and B. B. sits down, under protest.*] Let me take your hat. [*He takes B. B.'s hat unceremoniously and substitutes it for the cardinal's hat on the head of the lay figure, thereby ingeniously destroying the dignity of the conclave. He then draws the piano stool from the wall and offers it to WALPOLE.*] You dont mind this, Walpole, do you? [*WALPOLE accepts the stool, and puts his hand into his pocket for his cigaret case. Missing it, he is reminded of his loss.*]

WALPOLE. By the way, I'll trouble you for my cigaret case, if you dont mind?

LOUIS. What cigaret case?

WALPOLE. The gold one I lent you at the Star and Garter.

LOUIS [*surprised*]. Was that yours?

WALPOLE. Yes.

LOUIS. I'm awfully sorry, old chap. I wondered whose it was. I'm sorry to say this is all thats left of it. [*He hitches up his smock; produces a card from his waistcoat pocket; and hands it to WALPOLE.*]

WALPOLE. A pawn ticket!

LOUIS [*reassuringly*]. It's quite safe: he cant sell it for a year, you know. I say, my dear Walpole, I am sorry. [*He places his hand ingenuously on WALPOLE's shoulder and looks frankly at him.*]

WALPOLE [*sinking on the stool with a gasp*]. Dont mention it. It adds to your fascination.

RIDGEON [*who has been standing near the easel*]. Before we go any further, you have a debt to pay, Mr Dubedat.

LOUIS. I have a precious lot of debts to pay, Ridgeon. I'll fetch you a chair. [*He makes for the inner door.*]

RIDGEON [*stopping him*]. You shall not leave the room until you pay it. It's a small one; and pay it you must and shall. I dont so much mind your borrowing £10 from one of my guests and £20 from the other—

WALPOLE. I walked into it, you know. I offered it.

RIDGEON. —they could afford it. But to clean poor Blenkinsop out of his last half-crown was damnable. I intended to give him that half-crown and to be in a position to pledge him my word that you paid it. I'll have that out of you, at all events.

B. B. Quite right, Ridgeon. Quite right. Come, young man! down with the dust. Pay up.

LOUIS. Oh, you neednt make such a fuss about it. Of course I'll pay it. I had no idea the poor fellow was hard up. I'm as shocked as any of you about it. [*Putting his hand into his pocket.*] Here you are. [*Finding his pocket empty.*] Oh, I say, I havnt any money on me just at present. Walpole: would you mind lending me half-a-crown just to settle this.

WALPOLE. Lend you half—[*his voice faints away*].

LOUIS. Well, if you dont, Blenkinsop wont get it; for I havnt a rap: you may search my pockets if you like.

WALPOLE. Thats conclusive. [*He produces half-a-crown.*]

LOUIS [*passing it to Ridgeon*]. There! I'm really glad thats settled: it was the only thing that was on my conscience. Now I hope youre all satisfied.

SIR PATRICK. Not quite, Mr Dubedat. Do you happen to know a young woman named Minnie Tinwell?

LOUIS. Minnie! I should think I do; and Minnie knows me too. She's a really nice good girl, considering her station. Whats become of her?

WALPOLE. It's no use bluffing, Dubedat. Weve seen Minnie's marriage-lines.

LOUIS [*coolly*]. Indeed? Have you seen Jennifer's?

RIDGEON [*rising in irrepressible rage*]. Do you dare insinuate that Mrs Dubedat is living with you without being married to you?

LOUIS. Why not?

B. B.	} [<i>echoing him in various tones of scandalized amazement</i>]	Why not!
SIR PATRICK		Why not!
RIDGEON		Why not!
WALPOLE		Why not!

LOUIS. Yes, why not? Lots of people do it: just as good people as you. Why dont you learn to think, instead of bleating and baahing like a lot of sheep when you come up against anything youre not accustomed to? [*Contemplating their amazed faces with a chuckle.*] I say: I should like to draw the lot of you now: you do look jolly foolish. Especially you, Ridgeon. I had you that time, you know.

RIDGEON. How, pray?

LOUIS. Well, you set up to appreciate Jennifer, you know. And you despise me, dont you?

RIDGEON [*curtly*]. I loathe you. [*He sits down again on the sofa.*]

LOUIS. Just so. And yet you believe that Jennifer is a bad lot because you think I told you so.

RIDGEON. Were you lying?

LOUIS. No; but you were smelling out a scandal instead of keeping your

mind clean and wholesome. I can just play with people like you. I only asked you had you seen Jennifer's marriage lines; and you concluded straight away that she hadn't got any. You don't know a lady when you see one.

B. B. [*majestically*]. What do you mean by that, may I ask?

LOUIS. Now, I'm only an immoral artist; but if you'd told me that Jennifer wasn't married, I'd have had the gentlemanly feeling and artistic instinct to say that she carried her marriage certificate in her face and in her character. But you are all moral men; and Jennifer is only an artist's wife—probably a model; and morality consists of suspecting other people of not being legally married. Aren't you ashamed of yourselves? Can one of you look me in the face after it?

WALPOLE. It's very hard to look you in the face, Dubedat; you have such a dazzling cheek. What about Minnie Tinwell, eh?

LOUIS. Minnie Tinwell is a young woman who has had three weeks of glorious happiness in her poor little life, which is more than most girls in her position get, I can tell you. Ask her whether she'd take it back if she could. She's got her name into history, that girl. My little sketches of her will be fought for by collectors at Christie's. She'll have a page in my biography. Pretty good, that, for a still-room⁴ maid at a seaside hotel, I think. What have you fellows done for her to compare with that?

RIDGEON. We haven't trapped her into a mock marriage and deserted her.

LOUIS. No: you wouldn't have the pluck. But don't fuss yourselves. I didn't desert little Minnie. We spent all our money—

WALPOLE. All her money. Thirty pounds.

LOUIS. I said all our money: hers and mine too. Her thirty pounds didn't last three days. I had to borrow four times as much to spend on her. But I didn't grudge it; and she didn't grudge her few pounds either, the brave little lassie. When we were cleaned out, we'd had enough of it: you can hardly suppose that we were fit company for longer than that; I an artist, and she quite out of art and literature and refined living and everything else. There was no desertion, no misunderstanding, no police court or divorce court sensation for you moral chaps to lick your lips over at breakfast. We just said, Well, the money's gone: we've had a good time that can never be taken from us; so kiss; part good friends; and she back to service, and I back to my studio and my Jennifer, both the better and happier for our holiday.

WALPOLE. Quite a little poem, by George!

B. B. If you had been scientifically trained, Mr Dubedat, you would know how very seldom an actual case bears out a principle. In medical practice a man may die when, scientifically speaking, he ought to have lived. I have actually known a man die of a disease from which he was, scientifically speaking, immune. But that does not affect the fundamental truth of science. In just the same way, in moral cases, a man's behavior may be quite harmless and even beneficial, when he is morally behaving like a scoundrel. And he may do great harm when he is morally acting on the highest principles. But that does not affect the fundamental truth of morality.

SIR PATRICK. And it doesn't affect the criminal law on the subject of bigamy.

LOUIS. Oh bigamy! bigamy! bigamy! What a fascination anything connected with the police has for you all, you moralists! I've proved to you that you

⁴ In Great Britain, a room connected with the kitchen where liquors, preserves, and cakes are kept and tea, coffee, and other beverages are prepared.

were utterly wrong on the moral point: now I'm going to shew you that youre utterly wrong on the legal point; and I hope it will be a lesson to you not to be so jolly cocksure next time.

WALPOLE. Rot! You were married already when you married her; and that settles it.

LOUIS. Does it! Why cant you think? How do you know she wasnt married already too?

B. B.	} <i>[all crying out together]</i>	{ Walpole! Ridgeon! This is beyond everything. Well, damn me! -You young rascal.
RIDGEON		
WALPOLE		
SIR PATRICK		

LOUIS [*ignoring their outcry*]. She was married to the steward of a liner. He cleared out and left her; and she thought, poor girl, that it was the law that if you hadnt heard of your husband for three years you might marry again. So as she was a thoroughly respectable girl and refused to have anything to say to me unless we were married I went through the ceremony to please her and to preserve her self-respect.

RIDGEON. Did you tell her you were already married?

LOUIS. Of course not. Dont you see that if she had known, she wouldnt have considered herself my wife? You dont seem to understand, somehow.

SIR PATRICK. You let her risk imprisonment in her ignorance of the law?

LOUIS. Well, I risked imprisonment for her sake; I could have been had up for it just as much as she. But when a man makes a sacrifice of that sort for a woman, he doesnt go and brag about it to her; at least, not if he's a gentleman.

WALPOLE. What are we to do with this daisy!

LOUIS [*impatiently*]. Oh, go and do whatever the devil you please. Put Minnie in prison. Put me in prison. Kill Jennifer with the disgrace of it all. And then, when youve done all the mischief you can, go to church and feel good about it. [*He sits down pettishly on the old chair at the easel, and takes up a sketching block, on which he begins to draw.*]

WALPOLE. He's got us.

SIR PATRICK [*grimly*]. He has.

B. B. But is he to be allowed to defy the criminal law of the land?

SIR PATRICK. The criminal law is no use to decent people. It only helps blackguards to blackmail their families. What are we family doctors doing half our time but conspiring with the family solicitor to keep some rascal out of jail and some family out of disgrace?

B. B. But at least it will punish him.

SIR PATRICK. Oh yes: it'll punish him. It'll punish not only him but everybody connected with him, innocent and guilty alike. It'll throw his board and lodging on our rates and taxes for a couple of years, and then turn him loose on us a more dangerous blackguard than ever. It'll put the girl in prison and ruin her: it'll lay his wife's life waste. You may put the criminal law out of your head once for all: it's only fit for fools and savages.

LOUIS. Would you mind turning your face a little more this way, Sir Patrick. [*Sir Patrick turns indignantly and glares at him.*] Oh, thats too much.

SIR PATRICK. Put down your foolish pencil, man; and think of your position. You can defy the laws made by men; but there are other laws to reckon with. Do you know that youre going to die?

LOUIS. We're all going to die, arnt we?

WALPOLE. We're not all going to die in six months.

LOUIS. How do you know?

[*This for B. B. is the last straw. He completely loses his temper and begins to walk excitedly about.*]

B. B. Upon my soul, I will not stand this. It is in questionable taste under any circumstances or in any company to harp on the subject of death; but it is a dastardly advantage to take of a medical man. [*Thundering at DUBEDAT.*] I will not allow it, do you hear?

LOUIS. Well, I didnt begin it: you chaps did. It's always the way with the inartistic professions: when theyre beaten in argument they fall back on intimidation. I never knew a lawyer yet who didnt threaten to put me in prison sooner or later. I never knew a parson who didnt threaten me with damnation. And now you threaten me with death. With all your tall talk youve only one real trump in your hand, and thats Intimidation. Well, I'm not a coward; so it's no use with me.

B. B. [*advancing upon him*]. I'll tell you what you are, sir. Youre a scoundrel.

LOUIS. Oh, I dont mind you calling me a scoundrel a bit. It's only a word: a word that you dont know the meaning of. What is a scoundrel?

B. B. You are a scoundrel, sir.

LOUIS. Just so. What is a scoundrel? I am. What am I? A scoundrel. It's just arguing in a circle. And you imagine youre a man of science!

B. B. I—I—I—I have a good mind to take you by the scruff of your neck, you infamous rascal, and give you a sound thrashing.

LOUIS. I wish you would. Youd pay me something handsome to keep it out of court afterwards. [B. B., *baffled, flings away from him with a snort.*] Have you any more civilities to address to me in my own house? I should like to get them over before my wife comes back. [*He resumes his sketching.*]

RIDGEON. My mind's made up. When the law breaks down, honest men must find a remedy for themselves. I will not lift a finger to save this reptile.

B. B. That is the word I was trying to remember. Reptile.

WALPOLE. I cant help rather liking you, Dubedat. But you certainly are a thoroughgoing specimen.

SIR PATRICK. You know our opinion of you now, at all events.

LOUIS [*patiently putting down his pencil*]. Look here. All this is no good. You dont understand. You imagine that I'm simply an ordinary criminal.

WALPOLE. Not an ordinary one, Dubedat. Do yourself justice.

LOUIS. Well, youre on the wrong track altogether. I'm not a criminal. All your moralizings have no value for me. I dont believe in morality. I'm a disciple of Bernard Shaw.

SIR PATRICK } { [*puzzled*]. Eh?

B. B. } { [*waving his hand as if the subject were now disposed of*]. Thats enough: I wish to hear no more.

LOUIS. Of course I havnt the ridiculous vanity to set up to be exactly a Superman; but still, it's an ideal that I strive towards just as any other man strives towards his ideal.

B. B. [*intolerant*]. Dont trouble to explain. I now understand you perfectly. Say no more, please. When a man pretends to discuss science, morals, and re-

ligion, and then avows himself a follower of a notorious and avowed anti-vaccinationist, there is nothing more to be said. [*Suddenly putting in an effusive saving clause in parentheses to Ridgeon.*] Not, my dear Ridgeon, that I believe in vaccination in the popular sense any more than you do: I neednt tell you that. But there are things that place a man socially; and anti-vaccination is one of them. [*He resumes his seat on the dais.*]

SIR PATRICK. Bernard Shaw? I never heard of him. He's a Methodist preacher, I suppose.

LOUIS [*scandalized*]. No, no. He's the most advanced man now living: he isnt anything.

SIR PATRICK. I assure you, young man, my father learnt the doctrine of deliverance from sin from John Wesley's own lips before you or Mr Shaw were born. It used to be very popular as an excuse for putting sand in sugar and water in milk. You're a sound Methodist, my lad; only you dont know it.

LOUIS [*seriously annoyed for the first time*]. It's an intellectual insult. I dont believe theres such a thing as sin.

SIR PATRICK. Well, sir, there are people who dont believe theres such a thing as disease either. They call themselves Christian Scientists, I believe. Theyll just suit your complaint. We can do nothing for you. [*He rises.*] Good afternoon to you.

LOUIS [*running to him piteously*]. Oh dont get up, Sir-Patrick. Dont go. Please dont. I didnt mean to shock you, on my word. Do sit down again. Give me another chance. Two minutes more: thats all I ask.

SIR PATRICK [*surprised by this sign of grace, and a little touched*]. Well— [*He sits down.*]—

LOUIS [*gratefully*]. Thanks awfully.

SIR PATRICK [*continuing*]. —I dont mind giving you two minutes more. But dont address yourself to me; for Ive retired from practice; and I dont pretend to be able to cure your complaint. Your life is in the hands of these gentlemen.

RIDGEON. Not in mine. My hands are full. I have no time and no means available for this case.

SIR PATRICK. What do you say, Mr Walpole?

WALPOLE. Oh, I'll take him in hand: I dont mind. I feel perfectly convinced that this is not a moral case at all: it's a physical one. Theres something abnormal about his brain. That means, probably, some morbid condition affecting the spinal cord. And that means the circulation. In short, it's clear to me that he's suffering from an obscure form of blood-poisoning, which is almost certainly due to an accumulation of ptomaines in the nuciform sac. I'll remove the sac—

LOUIS [*changing color*]. Do you mean, operate on me? Ugh! No, thank you.

WALPOLE. Never fear: you wont feel anything. Youll be under an anæsthetic, of course. And it will be extraordinarily interesting.

LOUIS. Oh, well, if it would interest you, and if it wont hurt, thats another matter. How much will you give me to let you do it?

WALPOLE [*rising indignantly*]. How much! What do you mean?

LOUIS. Well, you dont expect me to let you cut me up for nothing, do you?

WALPOLE. Will you paint my portrait for nothing?

LOUIS. No: but I'll give you the portrait when it's painted; and you can sell it afterwards for perhaps double the money. But I cant sell my nuciform sac when youve cut it out.

WALPOLE. Ridgeon: did you ever hear anything like this! [To LOUIS.] Well, you can keep your nuciform sac, and your tubercular lung, and your diseased brain: I've done with you. One would think I was not conferring a favor on the fellow! [He returns to his stool in high dudgeon.]

SIR PATRICK. That leaves only one medical man who has not withdrawn from your case, Mr Dubedat. You have nobody left to appeal to now but Sir Ralph Bloomfield Bonington.

WALPOLE. If I were you, B. B., I shouldnt touch him with a pair of tongs. Let him take his lungs to the Brompton Hospital. They wont cure him; but theyll teach him manners.

B. B. My weakness is that I have never been able to say No, even to the most thoroughly undeserving people. Besides, I am bound to say that I dont think it is possible in medical practice to go into the question of the value of the lives we save. Just consider, Ridgeon. Let me put it to you, Paddy. Clear your mind of cant, Walpole.

WALPOLE [indignantly]. My mind is perfectly clear of cant.

B. B. Quite so. Well now, look at my practice. It is what I suppose you would call a fashionable practice, a smart practice, a practice among the best people. You ask me to go into the question of whether my patients are of any use either to themselves or anyone else. Well, if you apply any scientific test known to me, you will achieve a *reductio ad absurdum*. You will be driven to the conclusion that the majority of them would be, as my friend Mr J. M. Barrie⁵ has tersely phrased it, better dead. Better dead. There are exceptions, no doubt. For instance, there is the court, an essentially social-democratic institution, supported out of public funds by the public because the public wants it and likes it. My court patients are hard-working people who give satisfaction, undoubtedly. Then I have a duke or two whose estates are probably better managed than they would be in public hands. But as to most of the rest, if I once began to argue about them, unquestionably the verdict would be, Better dead. When they actually do die, I sometimes have to offer that consolation, thinly disguised, to the family. [Lulled by the cadences of his own voice, he becomes drowsier and drowsier.] The fact that they spend money so extravagantly on medical attendance really would not justify me in wasting my talents—such as they are—in keeping them alive. After all, if my fees are high, I have to spend heavily. My own tastes are simple: a camp bed, a couple of rooms, a crust, a bottle of wine; and I am happy and contented. My wife's tastes are perhaps more luxurious; but even she deploras an expenditure the sole object of which is to maintain the state my patients require from their medical attendant. The—er—er—er—[suddenly waking up] I have lost the thread of these remarks. What was I talking about, Ridgeon?

RIDGEON. About Dubedat.

B. B. Ah yes. Precisely. Thank you. Dubedat, of course. Well, what is our friend Dubedat? A vicious and ignorant young man with a talent for drawing.

LOUIS. Thank you. Dont mind me.

B. B. But then, what are many of my patients? Vicious and ignorant young men without a talent for anything. If I were to stop to argue about their merits I should have to give up three-quarters of my practice. Therefore I have made it

⁵ An English writer (1860–1937), principally of plays, who wrote the short story “Better Dead” in 1887.

a rule not so to argue. Now, as an honorable man, having made that rule as to paying patients, can I make an exception as to a patient who, far from being a paying patient, may more fitly be described as a borrowing patient. No. I say No. Mr Dubedat: your moral character is nothing to me. I look at you from a purely scientific point of view. To me you are simply a field of battle in which an invading army of tubercle bacilli struggles with a patriotic force of phagocytes. Having made a promise to your wife, which my principles will not allow me to break, to stimulate those phagocytes, I will stimulate them. And I take no further responsibility. [*He flings himself back in his seat exhausted.*]

SIR PATRICK. Well, Mr Dubedat, as Sir Ralph has very kindly offered to take charge of your case, and as the two minutes I promised you are up, I must ask you to excuse me. [*He rises.*]

LOUIS. Oh, certainly. I've quite done with you. [*Rising and holding up the sketch block.*] There! While you've been talking, I've been doing. What is there left of your moralizing? Only a little carbonic acid gas which makes the room unhealthy. What is there left of my work? That. Look at it. [*RIDGEON rises to look at it.*]

SIR PATRICK [*who has come down to him from the throne*]. You young rascal, was it drawing me you were?

LOUIS. Of course. What else?

SIR PATRICK [*takes the drawing from him and grunts approvingly*]. That's rather good. Don't you think so, Colly?

RIDGEON. Yes. So good that I should like to have it.

SIR PATRICK. Thank you; but I should like to have it myself. What d'ye think, Walpole?

WALPOLE [*rising and coming over to look*]. No, by Jove: I must have this.

LOUIS. I wish I could afford to give it to you, Sir Patrick. But I'd pay five guineas sooner than part with it.

RIDGEON. Oh, for that matter, I will give you six for it.

WALPOLE. Ten.

LOUIS. I think Sir Patrick is morally entitled to it, as he sat for it. May I send it to your house, Sir Patrick, for twelve guineas?

SIR PATRICK. Twelve guineas! Not if you were President of the Royal Academy, young man. [*He gives him back the drawing decisively and turns away, taking up his hat.*]

LOUIS [*to B. B.*]. Would you like to take it at twelve, Sir Ralph?

B. B. [*coming between LOUIS and WALPOLE*]. Twelve guineas? Thank you: I'll take it at that. [*He takes it and presents it to SIR PATRICK.*] Accept it from me, Paddy; and may you long be spared to contemplate it.

SIR PATRICK. Thank you. [*He puts the drawing into his hat.*]

B. B. I needn't settle with you now, Mr Dubedat: my fees will come to more than that. [*He also retrieves his hat.*]

LOUIS [*indignantly*]. Well, of all the mean—[*words fail him*]! I'd let myself be shot sooner than do a thing like that. I consider you've stolen that drawing.

SIR PATRICK [*drily*]. So we've converted you to a belief in morality after all, eh?

LOUIS. Yah! [*To WALPOLE.*] I'll do another one for you, Walpole, if you'll let me have the ten you promised.

WALPOLE. Very good. I'll pay on delivery.

LOUIS. Oh! What do you take me for? Have you no confidence in my honor?

WALPOLE. None whatever.

LOUIS. Oh well, of course if you feel that way, you cant help it. Before you go, Sir Patrick, let me fetch Jennifer. I know she'd like to see you, if you dont mind. [*He goes to the inner door.*] And now, before she comes in, one word. Youve all been talking here pretty freely about me—in my own house too. I dont mind that: I'm a man and can take care of myself. But when Jennifer comes in please remember that she's a lady, and that you are supposed to be gentlemen. [*He goes out.*]

WALPOLE. Well!!! [*He gives the situation up as indescribable, and goes for his hat.*]

RIDGEON. Damn his impudence!

B. B. I shouldnt be at all surprised to learn that he's well connected. Whenever I meet dignity and self-possession without any discoverable basis, I diagnose good family.

RIDGEON. Diagnose artistic genius, B. B. Thats what saves his self-respect.

SIR PATRICK. The world is made like that. The decent fellows are always being lectured and put out of countenance by the snobs.

B. B. [*altogether refusing to accept this*]. I am not out of countenance. I should like, by Jupiter, to see the man who could put me out of countenance. [*JENNIFER comes in.*] Ah, Mrs Dubedat! And how are we today?

MRS DUBEDAT [*shaking hands with him*]. Thank you all so much for coming. [*She shakes WALPOLE's hand.*] Thank you, Sir Patrick. [*She shakes SIR PATRICK's.*] Oh, life has been worth living since I have known you. Since Richmond I have not known a moment's fear. And it used to be nothing but fear. Wont you sit down and tell me the result of the consultation.

WALPOLE. I'll go, if you dont mind, Mrs Dubedat. I have an appointment. Before I go, let me say that I am quite agreed with my colleagues here as to the character of the case. As to the cause and the remedy, thats not my business: I'm only a surgeon; and these gentlemen are physicians and will advise you. I may have my own views: in fact I have them; and they are perfectly well known to my colleagues. If I am needed—and needed I shall be finally—they know where to find me; and I am always at your service. So for today, goodbye. [*He goes out, leaving JENNIFER much puzzled by his unexpected withdrawal and formal manner.*]

SIR PATRICK. I also will ask you to excuse me, Mrs Dubedat.

RIDGEON [*anxiously*]. Are you going?

SIR PATRICK. Yes: I can be of no use here; and I must be getting back. As you know, maam, I'm not in practice now; and I shall not be in charge of the case. It rests between Sir Colenso Ridgeon and Sir Ralph Bloomfield Bonington. They know my opinion. Good afternoon to you, maam. [*He bows and makes for the door.*]

MRS DUBEDAT [*detaining him*]. Theres nothing wrong, is there? You dont think Louis is worse, do you?

SIR PATRICK. No: he's not worse. Just the same as at Richmond.

MRS DUBEDAT. Oh, thank you: you frightened me. Excuse me.

SIR PATRICK. Dont mention it, maam. [*He goes out.*]

B. B. Now, Mrs Dubedat, if I am to take the patient in hand—

MRS DUBEDAT [*apprehensively, with a glance at RIDGEON*]. You! But I thought that Sir Colenso—

B. B. [*beaming with the conviction that he is giving her a most gratifying surprise*]. My dear lady, your husband shall have Me.

MRS DUBEDAT. But—

B. B. Not a word: it is a pleasure to me, for your sake. Sir Colenso Ridgeon will be in his proper place, in the bacteriological laboratory. I shall be in my proper place, at the bedside. Your husband shall be treated exactly as if he were a member of the royal family. [MRS DUBEDAT *uneasy again is about to protest*.] No gratitude: it would embarrass me, I assure you. Now, may I ask whether you are particularly tied to these apartments. Of course, the motor has annihilated distance; but I confess that if you were rather nearer to me, it would be a little more convenient.

MRS DUBEDAT. You see, this studio and flat are self-contained. I have suffered so much in lodgings. The servants are so frightfully dishonest.

B. B. Ah! Are they? Are they? Dear me!

MRS DUBEDAT. I was never accustomed to lock things up. And I missed so many small sums. At last a dreadful thing happened. I missed a five-pound note. It was traced to the housemaid; and she actually said Louis had given it to her. And he wouldnt let me do anything: he is so sensitive that these things drive him mad.

B. B. Ah—hm—ha—yes—say no more, Mrs Dubedat: you shall not move. If the mountain will not come to Mahomet, Mahomet must come to the mountain. Now I must be off. I will write and make an appointment. We shall begin stimulating the phagocytes on—on—probably on Tuesday next; but I will let you know. Depend on me; dont fret; eat regularly; sleep well; keep your spirits up; keep the patient cheerful; hope for the best; no tonic like a charming woman; no medicine like cheerfulness; no resource like science; goodbye, goodbye, goodbye. [*Having shaken hands—she being too overwhelmed to speak—he goes out, stopping to say to RIDGEON*] On Tuesday morning send me down a tube of some really stiff anti-toxin. Any kind will do. Dont forget. Goodbye, Colly. [*He goes out.*]

RIDGEON. You look quite discouraged again. [*She is almost in tears.*] Whats the matter? Are you disappointed?

MRS DUBEDAT. I know I ought to be very grateful. Believe me, I am very grateful. But—but—

RIDGEON. Well?

MRS DUBEDAT. I had set my heart on your curing Louis.

RIDGEON. Well, Sir Ralph Bloomfield Bonington—

MRS DUBEDAT. Yes, I know, I know. It is a great privilege to have him. But oh, I wish it had been you. I know it's unreasonable; I cant explain; but I had such a strong instinct that you would cure him. I dont—I cant feel the same about Sir Ralph. You promised me. Why did you give Louis up?

RIDGEON. I explained to you. I cannot take another case.

MRS DUBEDAT. But at Richmond?

RIDGEON. At Richmond I thought I could make room for one more case. But my old friend Dr Blenkinsop claimed that place. His lung is attacked.

MRS DUBEDAT [*attaching no importance whatever to BLENKINSOP*]. Do you mean that elderly man—that rather silly—

RIDGEON [*sternly*]. I mean the gentleman that dined with us: an excellent and honest man, whose life is as valuable as anyone else's. I have arranged that I shall take his case, and that Sir Ralph Bloomfield Bonington shall take Mr Dubedat's.

MRS DUBEDAT [*turning indignantly on him*]. I see what it is. Oh! it is envious, mean, cruel. And I thought that you would be above such a thing.

RIDGEON. What do you mean?

MRS DUBEDAT. Oh, do you think I don't know? do you think it has never happened before? Why does everybody turn against him? Can you not forgive him for being superior to you? for being clever? for being braver? for being a great artist?

RIDGEON. Yes: I can forgive him for all that.

MRS DUBEDAT. Well, have you anything to say against him? I have challenged everyone who has turned against him—challenged them face to face to tell me any wrong thing he has done, any ignoble thought he has uttered. They have always confessed that they could not tell me one. I challenge you now. What do you accuse him of?

RIDGEON. I am like all the rest. Face to face, I cannot tell you one thing against him.

MRS DUBEDAT [*not satisfied*]. But your manner is changed. And you have broken your promise to me to make room for him as your patient.

RIDGEON. I think you are a little unreasonable. You have had the very best medical advice in London for him; and his case has been taken in hand by a leader of the profession. Surely—

MRS DUBEDAT. Oh, it is so cruel to keep telling me that. It seems all right; and it puts me in the wrong. But I am not in the wrong. I have faith in you; and I have no faith in the others. We have seen so many doctors: I have come to know at last when they are only talking and can do nothing. It is different with you. I feel that you know. You must listen to me, doctor. [*With sudden mis-giving*] Am I offending you by calling you doctor instead of remembering your title?

RIDGEON. Nonsense. I am a doctor. But mind you don't call Walpole one.⁶

MRS DUBEDAT. I don't care about Mr Walpole: it is you who must befriend me. Oh, will you please sit down and listen to me just for a few minutes. [*He assents with a grave inclination, and sits on the sofa. She sits on the easel chair.*] Thank you. I won't keep you long; but I must tell you the whole truth. Listen, I know Louis as nobody else in the world knows him or ever can know him. I am his wife. I know he has little faults: impatience, sensitiveness, even little selfishnesses that are too trivial for him to notice. I know that he sometimes shocks people about money because he is so utterly above it, and can't understand the value ordinary people set on it. Tell me: did he—did he borrow any money from you?

RIDGEON. He asked me for some—once.

MRS DUBEDAT [*tears again in her eyes*]. Oh, I am so sorry—so sorry. But he will never do it again: I pledge you my word for that. He has given me his promise: here in this room just before you came; and he is incapable of breaking

⁶ British surgeons—of whom Walpole is one—are traditionally called "Mister" rather than "Doctor."

his word. That was his only real weakness; and now it is conquered and done with for ever.

RIDGEON. Was that really his only weakness?

MRS DUBEDAT. He is perhaps sometimes weak about women, because they adore him so, and are always laying traps for him. And of course when he says he doesn't believe in morality, ordinary pious people think he must be wicked. You can understand, can't you, how all this starts a great deal of gossip about him, and gets repeated until even good friends get set against him?

RIDGEON. Yes: I understand.

MRS DUBEDAT. Oh, if you only knew the other side of him as I do! Do you know, doctor, that if Louis dishonored himself by a really bad action, I should kill myself.

RIDGEON. Come! don't exaggerate.

MRS DUBEDAT. I should. You don't understand that, you east country people.

RIDGEON. You did not see much of the world in Cornwall, did you?

MRS DUBEDAT [*naively*]. Oh yes. I saw a great deal every day of the beauty of the world—more than you ever see here in London. But I saw very few people, if that is what you mean. I was an only child.

RIDGEON. That explains a good deal.

MRS DUBEDAT. I had a great many dreams; but at last they all came to one dream.

RIDGEON [*with half a sigh*]. Yes, the usual dream.

MRS DUBEDAT [*surprised*]. Is it usual?

RIDGEON. As I guess. You haven't yet told me what it was.

MRS DUBEDAT. I didn't want to waste myself. I could do nothing myself; but I had a little property and I could help with it. I had even a little beauty: don't think me vain for knowing it. I knew that men of genius always had a terrible struggle with poverty and neglect at first. My dream was to save one of them from that, and bring some charm and happiness into his life. I prayed Heaven to send me one. I firmly believe that Louis was guided to me in answer to my prayer. He was no more like the other men I had met than the Thames Embankment is like our Cornish coasts. He saw everything that I saw, and drew it for me. He understood everything. He came to me like a child. Only fancy, doctor: he never even wanted to marry me: he never thought of the things other men think of! I had to propose it myself. Then he said he had no money. When I told him I had some, he said "Oh, all right," just like a boy. He is still like that, quite unspoiled, a man in his thoughts, a great poet and artist in his dreams, and a child in his ways. I gave him myself and all that I had that he might grow to his full height with plenty of sunshine. If I lost faith in him, it would mean the wreck and failure of my life. I should go back to Cornwall and die. I could show you the very cliff I should jump off. You must cure him: you must make him quite well again for me. I know that you can do it and that nobody else can. I implore you not to refuse what I am going to ask you to do. Take Louis yourself: and let Sir Ralph cure Dr Blenkinsop.

RIDGEON [*slowly*]. Mrs Dubedat: do you really believe in my knowledge and skill as you say you do?

MRS DUBEDAT. Absolutely. I do not give my trust by halves.

RIDGEON. I know that. Well, I am going to test you—hard. Will you believe me when I tell you that I understand what you have just told me; that I

have no desire but to serve you in the most faithful friendship; and that your hero must be preserved to you.

MRS DUBEDAT. Oh forgive me. Forgive what I said. You will preserve him to me.

RIDGEON. At all hazards. [*She kisses his hand. He rises hastily.*] No: you have not heard the rest. [*She rises too.*] You must believe me when I tell you that the one chance of preserving the hero lies in Louis being in the care of Sir Ralph.

MRS DUBEDAT [*firmly*]. You say so: I have no more doubts: I believe you. Thank you.

RIDGEON. Goodbye. [*She takes his hand.*] I hope this will be a lasting friendship.

MRS DUBEDAT. It will. My friendships end only with death.

RIDGEON. Death ends everything, doesnt it? Goodbye. [*With a sigh and a look of pity at her which she does not understand, he goes.*]

ACT IV

The studio. The easel is pushed back to the wall. Cardinal Death, holding his scythe and hour-glass like a sceptre and globe, sits on the throne. On the hat-stand hang the hats of SIR PATRICK and BLOOMFIELD BONINGTON. WALPOLE, just come in, is hanging up his beside them. There is a knock. He opens the door and finds RIDGEON there.

WALPOLE. Hallo, Ridgeon!

[*They come into the middle of the room together, taking off their gloves.*]

RIDGEON. Whats the matter? Have you been sent for, too.

WALPOLE. We've all been sent for. Ive only just come: I havnt seen him yet. The charwoman says that old Paddy Cullen has been here with B. B. for the last half-hour. [*SIR PATRICK, with bad news in his face, enters from the inner room.*] Well: whats up?

SIR PATRICK. Go in and see. B. B. is in there with him.

[*WALPOLE goes. RIDGEON is about to follow him; but SIR PATRICK stops him with a look.*]

RIDGEON. What has happened?

SIR PATRICK. Do you remember Jane Marsh's arm?

RIDGEON. Is that whats happened?

SIR PATRICK. Thats whats happened. His lung has gone like Jane's arm. I never saw such a case. He has got through three months galloping consumption in three days.

RIDGEON. B. B. got in on the negative phase.

SIR PATRICK. Negative or positive, the lad's done for. He wont last out the afternoon. He'll go suddenly: Ive often seen it.

RIDGEON. So long as he goes before his wife finds him out, I dont care. I fully expected this.

SIR PATRICK [*drily*]. It's a little hard on a lad to be killed because his wife has too high an opinion of him. Fortunately few of us are in any danger of that.

[*Sir Ralph comes from the inner room and hastens between them, humanely concerned, but professionally elate and communicative.*]

B. B. Ah, here you are, Ridgeon. Paddy's told you, of course.

RIDGEON. Yes.

B. B. It's an enormously interesting case. You know, Colly, by Jupiter, if I didnt know as a matter of scientific fact that I'd been stimulating the phagocytes, I should say I'd been stimulating the other things. What is the explanation of it, Sir Patrick? How do you account for it, Ridgeon? Have we over-stimulated the phagocytes? Have they not only eaten up the bacilli, but attacked and destroyed the red corpuscles as well? a possibility suggested by the patient's pallor. Nay, have they finally begun to prey on the lungs themselves? Or on one another? I shall write a paper about this case.

[*WALPOLE comes back, very serious, even shocked. He comes between B. B. and RIDGEON.*]

WALPOLE. Whew! B. B.: youve done it this time.

B. B. What do you mean?

WALPOLE. Killed him. The worst case of neglected blood-poisoning I ever saw. It's too late now to do anything. He'd die under the anæsthetic.

B. B. [*offended*]. Killed! Really, Walpole, if your monomania were not well known, I should take such an expression very seriously.

SIR PATRICK. Come come! When youve both killed as many people as I have in my time youll feel humble enough about it. Come and look at him, Colly.

[*RIDGEON and SIR PATRICK go into the inner room.*]

WALPOLE. I apologize, B. B. But it's blood-poisoning.

B. B. [*recovering his irresistible good nature*]. My dear Walpole, everything is blood-poisoning. But upon my soul, I shall not use any of that stuff of Ridgeon's again. What made me so sensitive about what you said just now is that, strictly between ourselves, Ridgeon has cooked our young friend's goose.

[*JENNIFER, worried and distressed, but always gentle, comes between them from the inner room. She wears a nurse's apron.*]

MRS DUBEDAT. Sir Ralph: what am I to do? That man who insisted on seeing me, and sent in word that his business was important to Louis, is a newspaper man. A paragraph appeared in the paper this morning saying that Louis is seriously ill; and this man wants to interview him about it. How can people be so brutally callous?

WALPOLE [*moving vengefully towards the door*]. You just leave me to deal with him!

MRS DUBEDAT [*stopping him*]. But Louis insists on seeing him: he almost began to cry about it. And he says he cant bear his room any longer. He says he wants to [*She struggles with a sob.*]*—to die in his studio. Sir Patrick says let him have his way: it can do no harm. What shall we do?*

B. B. [*encouragingly*]. Why, follow Sir Patrick's excellent advice, of course. As he says, it can do him no harm; and it will no doubt do him good—a great deal of good. He will be much the better for it.

MRS DUBEDAT [*a little cheered*]. Will you bring the man up here, Mr Walpole, and tell him that he may see Louis, but that he mustnt exhaust him by talking? [*WALPOLE nods and goes out by the outer door.*] Sir Ralph: dont be angry with me; but Louis will die if he stays here. I must take him to Cornwall. He will recover there.

B. B. [*brightening wonderfully, as if Dubedat were already saved*]. Cornwall! The very place for him! Wonderful for the lungs. Stupid of me not to think of it before. You are his best physician after all, dear lady. An inspiration! Cornwall: of course, yes, yes, yes.

MRS DUBEDAT [*comforted and touched*]. You are so kind, Sir Ralph. But dont give me much hope or I shall cry; and Louis cant bear that.

B. B. [*gently putting his protective arm round her shoulders*]. Then let us come back to him and help to carry him in. Cornwall! of course, of course. The very thing! [*They go together into the bedroom.*]

[WALPOLE returns with THE NEWSPAPER MAN, a cheerful, affable young man who is disabled for ordinary business pursuits by a congenital erroneousness which renders him incapable of describing accurately anything he sees, or understanding or reporting accurately anything he hears. As the only employment in which these defects do not matter is journalism (for a newspaper, not having to act on its descriptions and reports, but only to sell them to idly curious people, has nothing but honor to lose by inaccuracy and unveracity), he has perforce become a journalist, and has to keep up an air of high spirits through a daily struggle with his own illiteracy and the precariousness of his employment. He has a note-book, and occasionally attempts to make a note; but as he cannot write shorthand, and does not write with ease in any hand, he generally gives it up as a bad job before he succeeds in finishing a sentence.]

THE NEWSPAPER MAN [*looking round and making indecisive attempts at notes*]. This is the studio, I suppose.

WALPOLE. Yes.

THE NEWSPAPER MAN [*wittily*]. Where he has his models, eh?

WALPOLE [*grimly irresponsible*]. No doubt.

THE NEWSPAPER MAN. Cubicle, you said it was?

WALPOLE. Yes, tubercle.

THE NEWSPAPER MAN. Which way do you spell it: is it c-u-b-i-c-a-l or c-l-e?

WALPOLE. Tubercle, man, not cubical. [*Spelling it for him.*] T-u-b-e-r-c-l-e.

THE NEWSPAPER MAN. Oh! tubercle. Some disease, I suppose. I thought he had consumption. Are you one of the family or the doctor?

WALPOLE. I'm neither one nor the other. I am Mister Cutler Walpole. Put that down. Then put down Sir Colenso Ridgeon.

THE NEWSPAPER MAN. Pigeon?

WALPOLE. Ridgeon [*contemptuously snatching his book*]. Here: youd better let me write the names down for you: youre sure to get them wrong. That comes of belonging to an illiterate profession, with no qualifications and no public register. [*He writes the particulars.*]

THE NEWSPAPER MAN. Oh, I say: you have got your knife into us, havnt you?

WALPOLE [*vindictively*]. I wish I had: I'd make a better man of you. Now attend. [*Shewing him the book.*] These are the names of the three doctors. This is the patient. This is the address. This is the name of the disease. [*He shuts the book with a snap which makes the journalist blink, and returns it to him.*] Mr Dubedat will be brought in here presently. He wants to see you because he doesnt know how bad he is. We'll allow you to wait a few minutes to humor him; but if you talk to him, out you go. He may die at any moment.

THE NEWSPAPER MAN [*interested*]. Is he as bad as that? I say: I am in luck

today. Would you mind letting me photograph you? [*He produces a camera.*] Could you have a lancet or something in your hand?

WALPOLE. Put it up. If you want my photograph you can get it in Baker Street in any of the series of celebrities.

THE NEWSPAPER MAN. But theyll want to be paid. If you wouldnt mind [*fingering the camera*]—?

WALPOLE. I would. Put it up, I tell you. Sit down there and be quiet.

[THE NEWSPAPER MAN quickly sits down on the piano stool as DUBEDAT, in an invalid's chair, is wheeled in by MRS DUBEDAT and SIR RALPH. They place the chair between the dais and the sofa, where the easel stood before. LOUIS is not changed as a robust man would be; and he is not scared. His eyes look larger; and he is so weak physically that he can hardly move, lying on his cushions with complete languor; but his mind is active: it is making the most of his condition, finding voluptuousness in languor and drama in death. They are all impressed, in spite of themselves, except RIDGEON, who is implacable. B. B. is entirely sympathetic and forgiving. RIDGEON follows the chair with a tray of milk and stimulants. SIR PATRICK, who accompanies him, takes the tea-table from the corner and places it behind the chair for the tray. B. B. takes the easel chair and places it for JENNIFER at DUBEDAT's side, next the dais, from which the lay figure ogles the dying artist. B. B. then returns to DUBEDAT's left. JENNIFER sits. WALPOLE sits down on the edge of the dais. RIDGEON stands near him.]

LOUIS [*blissfully*]. Thats happiness. To be in a studio! Happiness!

MRS DUBEDAT. Yes, dear. Sir Patrick says you may stay here as long as you like.

LOUIS. Jennifer.

MRS DUBEDAT. Yes, my darling.

LOUIS. Is the newspaper man here?

THE NEWSPAPER MAN [*glibly*]. Yes, Mr Dubedat: I'm here, at your service. I represent the press. I thought you might like to let us have a few words about—about—er—well, a few words on your illness, and your plans for the season.

LOUIS. My plans for the season are very simple. I'm going to die.

MRS DUBEDAT [*tortured*]. Louis—dearest—

LOUIS. My darling: I'm very weak and tired. Dont put on me the horrible strain of pretending that I dont know. Ive been lying there listening to the doctors—laughing to myself. They know. Dearest: dont cry. It makes you ugly; and I cant bear that. [*She dries her eyes and recovers herself with a proud effort.*] I want you to promise me something.

MRS DUBEDAT. Yes, yes: you know I will. [*Imploringly.*] Only my love, my love, dont talk: it will waste your strength.

LOUIS. No: it will only use it up. Ridgeon: give me something to keep me going for a few minutes—not one of your confounded anti-toxins, if you dont mind. I have some things to say before I go.

RIDGEON [*looking at SIR PATRICK*]. I suppose it can do no harm? [*He pours out some spirit, and is about to add soda water when SIR PATRICK corrects him.*]

SIR PATRICK. In milk. Dont set him coughing.

LOUIS [*after drinking*]. Jennifer.

MRS DUBEDAT. Yes, dear.

LOUIS. If theres one thing I hate more than another, it's a widow. Promise me that youll never be a widow.

MRS DUBEDAT. My dear, what do you mean?

LOUIS. I want you to look beautiful. I want people to see in your eyes that you were married to me. The people in Italy used to point at Dante and say "There goes the man who has been in hell." I want them to point at you and say "There goes a woman who has been in heaven." It has been heaven, darling, hasn't it—sometimes?

MRS DUBEDAT. Oh yes, yes. Always, always.

LOUIS. If you wear black and cry, people will say "Look at that miserable woman: her husband made her miserable."

MRS DUBEDAT. No, never. You are the light and the blessing of my life. I never lived until I knew you.

LOUIS [*his eyes glistening*]. Then you must always wear beautiful dresses and splendid magic jewels. Think of all the wonderful pictures I shall never paint. [*She wins a terrible victory over a sob.*] Well, you must be transfigured with all the beauty of those pictures. Men must get such dreams from seeing you as they never could get from any daubing with paints and brushes. Painters must paint you as they never painted any mortal woman before. There must be a great tradition of beauty, a great atmosphere of wonder and romance. That is what men must always think of when they think of me. That is the sort of immortality I want. You can make that for me, Jennifer. There are lots of things you don't understand that every woman in the street understands; but you can understand that and do it as nobody else can. Promise me that immortality. Promise me you will not make a little hell of crape and crying and undertaker's horrors and withering flowers and all that vulgar rubbish.

MRS DUBEDAT. I promise. But all that is far off, dear. You are to come to Cornwall with me and get well. Sir Ralph says so.

LOUIS. Poor old B. B.!

B. B. [*affected to tears, turns away and whispers to SIR PATRICK*]. Poor fellow! Brain going.

LOUIS. Sir Patrick's there, isn't he?

SIR PATRICK. Yes, yes. I'm here.

LOUIS. Sit down, won't you? It's a shame to keep you standing about.

SIR PATRICK. Yes, yes. Thank you. All right.

LOUIS. Jennifer.

MRS DUBEDAT. Yes, dear. -

LOUIS [*with a strange look of delight*]. Do you remember the burning bush?

MRS DUBEDAT. Yes, yes. Oh, my dear, how it strains my heart to remember it now!

LOUIS. Does it? It fills me with joy. Tell them about it.

MRS DUBEDAT. It was nothing—only that once in my old Cornish home we lit the first fire of the winter; and when we looked through the window we saw the flames dancing in a bush in the garden.

LOUIS. Such a color! Garnet color. Waving like silk. Liquid lovely flame flowing up through the bay leaves, and not burning them. Well, I shall be a flame like that. I'm sorry to disappoint the poor little worms; but the last of me shall be the flame in the burning bush. Whenever you see the flame, Jennifer, that will be me. Promise me that I shall be burnt.

MRS DUBEDAT. Oh, if I might be with you, Louis!

LOUIS. No: you must always be in the garden when the bush flames. You are my hold on the world: you are my immortality. Promise.

MRS DUBEDAT. I'm listening. I shall not forget. You know that I promise.

LOUIS. Well, thats about all; except that you are to hang my pictures at the one-man show. I can trust your eye. You wont let anyone else touch them.

MRS DUBEDAT. You can trust me.

LOUIS. Then theres nothing more to worry about, is there? Give me some more of that milk. I'm fearfully tired; but if I stop talking I shant begin again. [SIR RALPH gives him a drink. He takes it and looks up quaintly.] I say, B. B., do you think anything would stop you talking?

B. B. [*almost unmanned*]. He confuses me with you, Paddy. Poor fellow! Poor fellow!

LOUIS [*musings*]. I used to be awfully afraid of death; but now it's come I have no fear; and I'm perfectly happy. Jennifer.

MRS DUBEDAT. Yes, dear?

LOUIS. I'll tell you a secret. I used to think that our marriage was all an affectation, and that I'd break loose and run away some day. But now that I'm going to be broken loose whether I like it or not, I'm perfectly fond of you, and perfectly satisfied because I'm going to live as part of you and not as my troublesome self.

MRS DUBEDAT [*heartbroken*]. Stay with me, Louis. Oh, dont leave me, dearest.

LOUIS. Not that I'm selfish. With all my faults I dont think Ive ever been really selfish. No artist can: Art is too large for that. You will marry again, Jennifer.

MRS DUBEDAT. Oh, how can you, Louis?

LOUIS [*insisting childishly*]. Yes, because people who have found marriage happy always marry again. Ah, I shant be jealous. [*Slyly*.] But dont talk to the other fellow too much about me: he wont like it. [*Almost chuckling*.] I shall be your lover all the time; but it will be a secret from him, poor devil!

SIR PATRICK. Come! youve talked enough. Try to rest awhile.

LOUIS [*wearily*]. Yes: I'm fearfully tired, but I shall have a long rest presently. I have something to say to you fellows. Youre all there, arnt you? I'm too weak to see anything but Jennifer's bosom. That promises rest.

RIDGEON. We are all here.

LOUIS [*startled*]. That voice sounded devilish. Take care, Ridgeon: my ears hear things that other people's ears cant. Ive been thinking—thinking. I'm cleverer than you imagine.

SIR PATRICK [*whispering to RIDGEON*]. Youve got on his nerves, Colly. Slip out quietly.

RIDGEON [*apart to SIR PATRICK*]. Would you deprive the dying actor of his audience?

LOUIS [*his face lighting up faintly with mischievous glee*]. I heard that, Ridgeon. That was good. Jennifer, dear: be kind to Ridgeon always; because he was the last man who amused me.

RIDGEON [*relentless*]. Was I?

LOUIS. But it's not true. It's you who are still on the stage. I'm half way home already.

MRS DUBEDAT [*to RIDGEON*]. What did you say?

LOUIS [*answering for him*]. Nothing, dear. Only one of those little secrets that men keep among themselves. Well, all you chaps have thought pretty hard things of me, and said them.

B. B. [*quite overcome*]. No, no, Dubedat. Not at all.

LOUIS. Yes, you have. I know what you all think of me. Dont imagine I'm sore about it. I forgive you.

WALPOLE [*involuntarily*]. Well, damn me! [*Ashamed.*] I beg your pardon.

LOUIS. That was old Walpole, I know. Dont grieve, Walpole. I'm perfectly happy. I'm not in pain. I dont want to live. Ive escaped from myself. I'm in heaven, immortal in the heart of my beautiful Jennifer. I'm not afraid, and not ashamed. [*Reflectively, puzzling it out for himself weakly.*] I know that in an accidental sort of way, struggling through the unreal part of life, I havnt always been able to live up to my ideal. But in my own real world I have never done anything wrong, never denied my faith, never been untrue to myself. Ive been threatened and blackmailed and insulted and starved. But Ive played the game. Ive fought the good fight. And now it's all over, theres an indescribable peace. [*He feebly holds his hands and utters his creed*]: I believe in Michael Angelo, Velasquez, and Rembrandt; in the might of design, the mystery of color, the redemption of all things by Beauty everlasting, and the message of Art that has made these hands blessed. Amen. Amen. [*He closes his eyes and lies still.*]

MRS DUBEDAT [*breathless*]. Louis: are you—

[*WALPOLE rises and comes quickly to see whether he is dead.*]

LOUIS. Not yet, dear. Very nearly, but not yet. I should like to rest my head on your bosom; only it would tire you.

MRS DUBEDAT. No, no, no, darling: how could you tire me? [*She lifts him so that he lies in her bosom.*]

LOUIS. Thats good. Thats real.

MRS DUBEDAT. Dont spare me, dear. Indeed indeed you will not tire me. Lean on me with all your weight.

LOUIS [*with a sudden half return of his normal strength and comfort*]. Jinny Gwinny: I think I shall recover after all. [*SIR PATRICK looks significantly at RIDGEON, mutely warning him that this is the end.*]

MRS DUBEDAT [*hopefully*]. Yes, yes: you shall.

LOUIS. Because I suddenly want to sleep. Just an ordinary sleep.

MRS DUBEDAT [*rocking him*]. Yes, dear. Sleep. [*He seems to go to sleep. WALPOLE makes another movement. She protests.*] Sh-sh: please dont disturb him. [*His lips move.*] What did you say, dear? [*In great distress.*] I cant listen without moving him. [*His lips move again: Walpole bends down and listens.*]

WALPOLE. He wants to know is the newspaper man here.

THE NEWSPAPER MAN [*excited; for he has been enjoying himself enormously*]. Yes, Mr Dubedat. Here I am.

[*WALPOLE raises his hand warningly to silence him. SIR RALPH sits down quietly on the sofa and frankly buries his face in his handkerchief.*]

MRS DUBEDAT [*with great relief*]. Oh thats right, dear: dont spare me: lean with all your weight on me. Now you are really resting.

[*SIR PATRICK quickly comes forward and feels Louis's pulse; then takes him by the shoulders.*]

SIR PATRICK. Let me put him back on the pillow, maam. He will be better so.

MRS DUBEDAT [*piteously*]. Oh no, please, please, doctor. He is not tiring me; and he will be so hurt when he wakes if he finds I have put him away.

SIR PATRICK. He will never wake again. [*He takes the body from her and replaces it in the chair. RIDGEON, unmoved, lets down the back and makes a bier of it.*]

MRS DUBEDAT [*who has unexpectedly sprung to her feet, and stands dry-eyed and stately*]. Was that death?

WALPOLE. Yes.

MRS DUBEDAT [*with complete dignity*]. Will you wait for me a moment. I will come back. [*She goes out.*]

WALPOLE. Ought we to follow her? Is she in her right senses?

SIR PATRICK [*with quiet conviction*]. Yes. She's all right. Leave her alone. She'll come back.

RIDGEON [*callously*]. Let us get this thing out of the way before she comes.

B. B. [*rising, shocked*]. My dear Colly! The poor lad! He died splendidly.

SIR PATRICK. Ay! that is how the wicked die.

For there are no bands in their death;
But their strength is firm:
They are not in trouble as other men.

No matter: it's not for us to judge. He's in another world now.

WALPOLE. Borrowing his first five-pound note there, probably.

RIDGEON. I said the other day that the most tragic thing in the world is a sick doctor. I was wrong. The most tragic thing in the world is a man of genius who is not also a man of honor.

[*RIDGEON and WALPOLE wheel the chair into the recess.*]

THE NEWSPAPER MAN [*to SIR RALPH*]. I thought it shewed a very nice feeling, his being so particular about his wife going into proper mourning for him and making her promise never to marry again.

B. B. [*impressively*]. Mrs Dubedat is not in a position to carry the interview any further. Neither are we.

SIR PATRICK. Good afternoon to you.

THE NEWSPAPER MAN. Mrs Dubedat said she was coming back.

B. B. After you have gone.

THE NEWSPAPER MAN. Do you think she would give me a few words on How It Feels to be a Widow? Rather a good title for an article, isn't it?

B. B. Young man: if you wait until Mrs Dubedat comes back, you will be able to write an article on How It Feels to be Turned Out of the House.

THE NEWSPAPER MAN [*unconvinced*]. You think she'd rather not—

B. B. [*cutting him short*]. Good day to you. [*Giving him a visiting-card.*] Mind you get my name correctly. Good day.

THE NEWSPAPER MAN. Good day. Thank you. [*Vaguely trying to read the card.*] Mr—

B. B. No, not Mister. This is your hat, I think [*giving it to him*]. Gloves? No, of course: no gloves. Good day to you. [*He edges him out at last; shuts the door on him; and returns to SIR PATRICK as RIDGEON and WALPOLE come back from the recess, WALPOLE crossing the room to the hat-stand, and RIDGEON coming be-*

tween SIR RALPH and SIR PATRICK.] Poor fellow! Poor young fellow! How well he died! I feel a better man, really.

SIR PATRICK. When you're as old as I am, you'll know that it matters very little how a man dies. What matters is, how he lives. Every fool that runs his nose against a bullet is a hero nowadays, because he dies for his country. Why don't he live for it to some purpose?

B. B. No, please, Paddy: don't be hard on the poor lad. Not now, not now. After all, was he so bad? He had only two failings, money and women. Well, let us be honest. Tell the truth, Paddy. Don't be hypocritical, Ridgeon. Throw off the mask, Walpole. Are these two matters so well arranged at present that a disregard of the usual arrangements indicates real depravity?

WALPOLE. I don't mind his disregarding the usual arrangements. Confound the usual arrangements! To a man of science they're beneath contempt both as to money and women. What I mind is his disregarding everything except his own pocket and his own fancy. He didn't disregard the usual arrangements when they paid him. Did he give us his pictures for nothing? Do you suppose he'd have hesitated to blackmail me if I'd compromised myself with his wife? Not he.

SIR PATRICK. Don't waste your time wrangling over him. A blackguard's a blackguard; an honest man's an honest man; and neither of them will ever be at a loss for a religion or a morality to prove that their ways are the right ways. It's the same with nations, the same with professions, the same all the world over and always will be.

B. B. Ah, well, perhaps, perhaps, perhaps. Still, *de mortuis nil nisi bonum*.⁷ He died extremely well, remarkably well. He has set us an example: let us endeavour to follow it rather than harp on the weaknesses that have perished with him. I think it is Shakespear who says that the good that most men do lives after them: the evil lies interréd with their bones. Yes: interréd with their bones. Believe me, Paddy, we are all mortal. It is the common lot, Ridgeon. Say what you will, Walpole, Nature's debt must be paid. If tis not today, twill be tomorrow.

To-morrow and to-morrow and to-morrow
After life's fitful fever they sleep well
And like this insubstantial bourne from which
No traveller returns
Leave not a wrack behind.

[WALPOLE is about to speak, but B. B., suddenly and vehemently proceeding, extinguishes him.]

Out, out, brief candle:
For nothing canst thou to damnation add;
The readiness is all.

WALPOLE [*gently, for B. B.'s feeling, absurdly expressed as it is, is too sincere and humane to be ridiculed*]. Yes, B. B. Death makes people go on like that. I don't know why it should; but it does. By the way, what are we going to do? Ought we to clear out; or had we better wait and see whether Mrs Dubedat will come back?

SIR PATRICK. I think we'd better go. We can tell the charwoman what to do.
[*They take their hats and go to the door.*]

MRS DUBEDAT [*coming from the inner room wonderfully and beautifully*

⁷ (Latin) Say nothing but what is good about the dead.

dressed, and radiant, carrying a great piece of purple silk, handsomely embroidered, over her arm]. I'm so sorry to have kept you waiting.

SIR PATRICK	} <i>[amazed, all together in a confused murmur]</i> .	{	Dont mention it, madam.
B. B.			Not at all, not at all.
RIDGEON			By no means.
WALPOLE			It doesnt matter in the least.

MRS DUBEDAT [*coming to them*]. I felt that I must shake hands with his friends once before we part today. We have shared together a great privilege and a great happiness. I dont think we can ever think of ourselves as ordinary people again. We have had a wonderful experience; and that gives us a common faith, a common ideal, that nobody else can quite have. Life will always be beautiful to us: death will always be beautiful to us. May we shake hands on that?

SIR PATRICK [*shaking hands*]. Remember: all letters had better be left to your solicitor. Let him open everything and settle everything. Thats the law, you know.

MRS DUBEDAT. Oh, thank you: I didnt know. [*Sir Patrick goes.*]

WALPOLE. Goodbye. I blame myself: I should have insisted on operating. [*He goes.*]

B. B. I will send the proper people: they will know what to do: you shall have no trouble. Goodbye, my dear lady. [*He goes.*]

RIDGEON. Goodbye. [*He offers his hand.*]

MRS DUBEDAT [*drawing back with gentle majesty*]. I said his friends, Sir Colenso. [*He bows and goes.*]

[*She unfolds the great piece of silk, and goes into the recess to cover the dead.*]

ACT V

One of the smaller Bond Street Picture Galleries. The entrance is from a picture shop. Nearly in the middle of the gallery there is a writing-table, at which THE SECRETARY, fashionably dressed, sits with his back to the entrance, correcting catalogue proofs. Some copies of a new book the on the desk, also THE SECRETARY's shining hat and a couple of magnifying glasses. At the side, on his left, a little behind him, is a small door marked PRIVATE. Near the same side is a cushioned bench parallel to the walls, which are covered with DUBEDAT's works. Two screens, also covered with drawings, stand near the corners right and left of the entrance.

JENNIFER, *beautifully dressed and apparently very happy and prosperous, comes into the gallery through the private door.*

JENNIFER. Have the catalogues come yet, Mr Danby?

THE SECRETARY. Not yet.

JENNIFER. What a shame! It's a quarter past: the private view will begin in less than half an hour.

THE SECRETARY. I think I'd better run over to the printers to hurry them up.

JENNIFER. Oh, if you would be so good, Mr Danby. I'll take your place while youre away.

THE SECRETARY. If anyone should come before the time dont take any notice. The commissioner wont let anyone through unless he knows him. We

have a few people who like to come before the crowd—people who really buy; and of course we're glad to see them. Have you seen the notices in *Brush and Crayon* and in *The Easel*?

JENNIFER [*indignantly*]. Yes: most disgraceful. They write quite patronizingly, as if they were Mr Dubedat's superiors. After all the cigars and sandwiches they had from us on the press day, and all they drank, I really think it is infamous that they should write like that. I hope you have not sent them tickets for today.

THE SECRETARY. Oh, they wont come again: theres no lunch today. The advance copies of your book have come. [*He indicates the new books.*]

JENNIFER [*pouncing on a copy, wildly excited*]. Give it to me. Oh! excuse me a moment [*she runs away with it through the private door*].

[*The Secretary takes a mirror from his drawer and smartens himself before going out. RIDGEON comes in.*]

RIDGEON. Good morning. May I look round, as usual, before the doors open?

THE SECRETARY. Certainly, Sir Colenso. I'm sorry the catalogues have not come: I'm just going to see about them. Heres my own list, if you dont mind.

RIDGEON. Thanks. What's this? [*He takes up one of the new books.*]

THE SECRETARY. Thats just come in. An advance copy of Mrs Dubedat's *Life of her late husband*.

RIDGEON [*reading the title*]. *The Story of a King of Men: By His Wife.* [*He looks at the portrait frontispiece.*] Ay: there he is. You knew him here, I suppose.

THE SECRETARY. Oh, we knew him. Better than she did, Sir Colenso, in some ways, perhaps.

RIDGEON. So did I. [*They look significantly at one another.*] I'll take a look round.

[*THE SECRETARY puts on the shining hat and goes out. RIDGEON begins looking at the pictures. Presently he comes back to the table for a magnifying glass, and scrutinizes a drawing very closely. He sighs; shakes his head, as if constrained to admit the extraordinary fascination and merit of the work; then marks THE SECRETARY's list. Proceeding with his survey, he disappears behind the screen. JENNIFER comes back with her book. A look round satisfies her that she is alone. She seats herself at the table and admires the memoir—her first printed book—to her heart's content. RIDGEON re-appears, face to the wall, scrutinizing the drawings. After using his glass again, he steps back to get a more distant view of one of the larger pictures. She hastily closes the book at the sound; looks round; recognizes him; and stares, petrified. He takes a further step back which brings him nearer to her.*]

RIDGEON [*shaking his head as before, ejaculates*]. Clever brute! [*She flushes as though he had struck her. He turns to put the glass down on the desk, and finds himself face to face with her intent gaze.*] I beg your pardon. I thought I was alone.

JENNIFER [*controlling herself, and speaking steadily and meaningly*]. I am glad we have met, Sir Colenso Ridgeon. I met Dr Blenkinsop yesterday. I congratulate you on a wonderful cure.

RIDGEON [*can find no words: makes an embarrassed gesture of assent after a moment's silence, and puts down the glass and THE SECRETARY's list on the table.*]

JENNIFER. He looked the picture of health and strength and prosperity. [*She looks for a moment at the walls, contrasting BLENKINSOP's fortune with the artist's fate.*]

RIDGEON [*in low tones, still embarrassed*]. He has been fortunate.

JENNIFER. Very fortunate. His life has been spared.

RIDGEON. I mean that he has been made a Medical Officer of Health. He cured the Chairman of the Borough Council very successfully.

JENNIFER. With your medicines?

RIDGEON. No. I believe it was with a pound of ripe greengages.

JENNIFER [*with deep gravity*]. Funny!

RIDGEON. Yes. Life does not cease to be funny when people die any more than it ceases to be serious when people laugh.

JENNIFER. Dr Blenkinsop said one very strange thing to me.

RIDGEON. What was that?

JENNIFER. He said that private practice in medicine ought to be put down by law. When I asked him why, he said that private doctors were ignorant licensed murderers.

RIDGEON. That is what the public doctor always thinks of the private doctor. Well, Blenkinsop ought to know. He was a private doctor long enough himself. Come! you have talked at me long enough. Talk to me. You have something to reproach me with. There is reproach in your face, in your voice: you are full of it. Out with it.

JENNIFER. It is too late for reproaches now. When I turned and saw you just now, I wondered how you could come here coolly to look at his pictures. You answered the question. To you, he was only a clever brute.

RIDGEON [*quivering*]. Oh, dont. You know I did not know you were here.

JENNIFER [*raising her head a little with a quite gentle impulse of pride*]. You think it only mattered because I heard it. As if it could touch me, or touch him! Dont you see that what is really dreadful is that to you living things have no souls.

RIDGEON [*with a sceptical shrug*]. The soul is an organ I have not come across in the course of my anatomical work.

JENNIFER. You know you would not dare to say such a silly thing as that to anybody but a woman whose mind you despise. If you dissected me you could not find my conscience. Do you think I have got none?

RIDGEON. I have met people who had none.

JENNIFER. Clever brutes? Do you know, doctor, that some of the dearest and most faithful friends I ever had were only brutes! You would have vivisected them. The dearest and greatest of all my friends had a sort of beauty and affectionateness that only animals have. I hope you may never feel what I felt when I had to put him into the hands of men who defend the torture of animals because they are only brutes.

RIDGEON. Well, did you find us so very cruel, after all? They tell me that though you have dropped me, you stay for weeks with the Bloomfield Boningtons and the Walpoles. I think it must be true, because they never mention you to me now.

JENNIFER. The animals in Sir Ralph's house are like spoiled children. When Mr Walpole had to take a splinter out of the mastiff's paw, I had to hold the poor dog myself; and Mr Walpole had to turn Sir Ralph out of the room.

And Mrs Walpole has to tell the gardener not to kill wasps when Mr Walpole is looking. But there are doctors who are naturally cruel; and there are others who get used to cruelty and are callous about it. They blind themselves to the souls of animals; and that blinds them to the souls of men and women. You made a dreadful mistake about Louis; but you would not have made it if you had not trained yourself to make the same mistake about dogs. You saw nothing in them but dumb brutes; and so you could see nothing in him but a clever brute.

RIDGEON [*with sudden resolution*]. I made no mistake whatever about him.

JENNIFER. Oh, doctor!

RIDGEON [*obstinately*]. I made no mistake whatever about him.

JENNIFER. Have you forgotten that he died?

RIDGEON [*with a sweep of his hand towards the pictures*]. He is not dead. He is there. [*Taking up the book.*] And there.

JENNIFER [*springing up with blazing eyes*]. Put that down. How dare you touch it?

[*Ridgeon, amazed at the fierceness of the outburst, puts it down with a deprecatory shrug. She takes it up and looks at it as if he had profaned a relic.*]

RIDGEON. I am very sorry. I see I had better go.

JENNIFER [*putting the book down*]. I beg your pardon. I—I forgot myself. But it is not yet—it is a private copy.

RIDGEON. But for me it would have been a very different book.

JENNIFER. But for you it would have been a longer one.

RIDGEON. You know then that I killed him?

JENNIFER [*suddenly moved and softened*]. Oh, doctor, if you acknowledge that—if you have confessed it to yourself—if you realize what you have done, then there is forgiveness. I trusted in your strength instinctively at first; then I thought I had mistaken callousness for strength. Can you blame me? But if it was really strength—if it was only such a mistake as we all make sometimes—it will make me so happy to be friends with you again.

RIDGEON. I tell you I made no mistake. I cured Blenkinsop: was there any mistake there?

JENNIFER. He recovered. Oh, don't be foolishly proud, doctor. Confess to a failure, and save our friendship. Remember, Sir Ralph gave Louis your medicine; and it made him worse.

RIDGEON. I can't be your friend on false pretences. Something has got me by the throat: the truth must come out. I used that medicine myself on Blenkinsop. It did not make him worse. It is a dangerous medicine: it cured Blenkinsop: it killed Louis Dubedat. When I handle it, it cures. When another man handles it, it kills,—sometimes.

JENNIFER [*navily: not yet taking it all in*]. Then why did you let Sir Ralph give it to Louis?

RIDGEON. I'm going to tell you. I did it because I was in love with you.

JENNIFER [*innocently surprised*]. In lo—You! an elderly man!

RIDGEON [*thunderstruck, raising his fists to heaven*]. Dubedat: thou art revenged! [*He drops his hands and collapses on the bench.*] I never thought of that. I suppose I appear to you a ridiculous old fogey.

JENNIFER. But surely—I did not mean to offend you, indeed—but you must be at least twenty years older than I am.

RIDGEON. Oh, quite. More, perhaps. In twenty years you will understand how little difference that makes.

JENNIFER. But even so, how could you think that I—his wife—could ever think of you—

RIDGEON [*stopping her with a nervous waving of his fingers*]. Yes, yes, yes, yes: I quite understand: you neednt rub it in.

JENNIFER. But—oh, it is only dawning on me now—I was so surprised at first—do you dare to tell me that it was to gratify a miserable jealousy that you deliberately—oh! oh! you murdered him.

RIDGEON. I think I did. It really comes to that.

Thou shalt not kill, but needst not strive
Officially to keep alive.

I suppose—yes: I killed him.

JENNIFER. And you tell me that! to my face! callously! You are not afraid!

RIDGEON. I am a doctor: I have nothing to fear. It is not an indictable offence to call in B. B. Perhaps it ought to be; but it isnt.

JENNIFER. I did not mean that. I meant afraid of my taking the law into my own hands, and killing you.

RIDGEON. I am so hopelessly idiotic about you that I should not mind it a bit. You would always remember me if you did that.

JENNIFER. I shall remember you always as a little man who tried to kill a great one.

RIDGEON. Pardon me. I succeeded.

JENNIFER [*with quiet conviction*]. No. Doctors think they hold the keys of life and death; but it is not their will that is fulfilled. I dont believe you made any difference at all.

RIDGEON. Perhaps not. But I intended to.

JENNIFER [*looking at him amazedly: not without pity*]. And you tried to destroy that wonderful and beautiful life merely because you grudged him a woman whom you could never have expected to care for you!

RIDGEON. Who kissed my hands. Who believed in me. Who told me her friendship lasted until death.

JENNIFER. And whom you were betraying.

RIDGEON. No. Whom I was saving.

JENNIFER [*gently*]. Pray, doctor, from what?

RIDGEON. From making a terrible discovery. From having your life laid waste.

JENNIFER. How?

RIDGEON. No matter. I have saved you. I have been the best friend you ever had. You are happy. You are well. His works are an imperishable joy and pride for you.

JENNIFER. And you think that is your doing. Oh doctor, doctor! Sir Patrick is right: you do think you are a little god. How can you be so silly? You did not paint those pictures which are my imperishable joy and pride: you did not speak the words that will always be heavenly music in my ears. I listen to them now whenever I am tired or sad. That is why I am always happy.

RIDGEON. Yes, now that he is dead. Were you always happy when he was alive?

JENNIFER [*wounded*]. Oh, you are cruel, cruel. When he was alive I did not know the greatness of my blessing. I worried meanly about little things. I was unkind to him. I was unworthy of him.

RIDGEON [*laughing bitterly*]. Ha!

JENNIFER. Dont insult me: dont blaspheme. [*She snatches up the book and presses it to her heart in a paroxysm of remorse, exclaiming.*] Oh, my King of Men!

RIDGEON. King of Men! Oh, this is too monstrous, too grotesque. We cruel doctors have kept the secret from you faithfully; but it is like all secrets: it will not keep itself. The buried truth germinates and breaks through to the light.

JENNIFER. What truth?

RIDGEON. What truth! Why, that Louis Dubedat, King of Men, was the most entire and perfect scoundrel, the most miraculously mean rascal, the most callously selfish blackguard that ever made a wife miserable.

JENNIFER [*unshaken: calm and lovely*]. He made his wife the happiest woman in the world, doctor.

RIDGEON. No: by all thats true on earth, he made his widow the happiest woman in the world; but it was I who made her a widow. And her happiness is my justification and my reward. Now you know what I did and what I thought of him. Be as angry with me as you like: at least you know me as I really am. If you ever come to care for an elderly man, you will know what you are caring for.

JENNIFER [*kind and quiet*]. I am not angry with you any more, Sir Colenso. I knew quite well that you did not like Louis: but it is not your fault: you dont understand: that is all. You never could have believed in him. It is just like your not believing in my religion: it is a sort of sixth sense that you have not got. And [*With a gentle reassuring movement towards him.*] dont think that you have shocked me so dreadfully. I know quite well what you mean by his selfishness. He sacrificed everything for his art. In a certain sense he had even to sacrifice everybody—

RIDGEON. Everybody except himself. By keeping that back he lost the right to sacrifice you, and gave me the right to sacrifice him. Which I did.

JENNIFER [*shaking her head, pitying his error*]. He was one of the men who know what women know: that self-sacrifice is vain and cowardly.

RIDGEON. Yes, when the sacrifice is rejected and thrown away. Not when it becomes the food of godhead.

JENNIFER. I dont understand that. And I cant argue with you: you are clever enough to puzzle me, but not to shake me. You are so utterly, so wildly wrong; so incapable of appreciating Louis—

RIDGEON. Oh! [*Taking up THE SECRETARY'S list.*] I have marked five pictures as sold to me.

JENNIFER. They will not be sold to you. Louis' creditors insisted on selling them; but this is my birthday; and they were all bought in for me this morning by my husband.

RIDGEON. By whom? !!!

JENNIFER. By my husband.

RIDGEON [*gabbling and stuttering*]. What husband? Whose husband? Which husband? Whom? how? what? Do you mean to say that you have married again?

JENNIFER. Do you forget that Louis disliked widows, and that people who have married happily once always marry again?

RIDGEON. Then I have committed a purely disinterested murder!

[*The Secretary returns with a pile of catalogues.*]

THE SECRETARY. Just got the first batch of catalogues in time. The doors are open.

JENNIFER [*to RIDGEON, politely*]. So glad you like the pictures, Sir Colenso. Good morning.

RIDGEON. Good morning. [*He goes towards the door; hesitates; turns to say something more; gives it up as a bad job; and goes.*]

COMMENTARY

Shaw called *The Doctor's Dilemma* a tragedy, but it is hard to believe that he meant the description seriously. In manner and tone the play is a comedy; this is scarcely contradicted by the fact that one of the persons in the play dies before our eyes, for Louis Dubedat's histrionic last moments make a scene that is affecting in no more than a sentimental way.

The oddity of the author's having called the play a tragedy has never engaged the kind of speculation that has long gone on about Chekhov's insistence that *Three Sisters* is a comedy. A few critics have attempted to affirm its seriousness by observing that Ridgeon undergoes a moral decline, to the point where he commits a quasi-murder; they identify this as the tragic element in the play. But although it is true that Ridgeon's moral nature deteriorates, this is hardly a tragic event; at most, it touches with a certain grimness the comedy in which it occurs. The likelihood is that Shaw had no other reason for applying the misnomer than the wish to be impudent, to amuse himself by confusing his audience.

And of course it is only if we take the play to be a comedy that we can accept the artificiality that is one of its salient features. Comedy has always claimed the right to treat probability with blithe indifference, and *The Doctor's Dilemma* takes full advantage of this ancient license. The events of the play are shameless contrivances, beginning with the terms of the "dilemma," the all too pat juxtaposition of the immoral genius and the virtuous mediocrity. Nowhere except in comedy could an eminent physician give a dinner party at which certain of the guests are co-opted to sit as a kind of investigating committee to help the host decide whether or not another of the guests deserves to receive the medical treatment that will rescue him from impending death. We are then asked to believe that the committee, once formed, cannot bring itself to disband, that three of the busiest doctors in London are so captivated by the moral situation that they find time to pursue their investigations at a meeting in Louis Dubedat's studio, and that all of them make a point of turning up at his deathbed.

But even more than by the unblushing high-handedness of its dealings with probability, the play is a comedy by its commitment to one of the oldest enterprises of the comic genre, the exhibition of the absurdity of doctors. How very old it is has been suggested by the English scholar F. M. Cornford, who traces

the comic doctor through various examples of folk drama, such as the Punch and Judy shows and the medieval mummers' plays, back to the comedy of ancient Greece.¹ According to Cornford, Greek comedy had its roots in the primitive rituals of the winter solstice; the figure of the comic doctor descends from the once awesome medicine man who presided over the ceremonial representation of the death of the old year and the birth of the new. In the comedy of the Renaissance the doctor is a stock figure, mocked for his pretentiousness and pomposity. The tradition of doctor-baiting reached its climax and its classic form in the several plays in which Molière ridiculed the physicians of his day. To the traditional mockery he added an intellectual dimension by concentrating on the elaborate jargon of scholasticism by which the profession masked its invincible ignorance.

By the nineteenth century the tradition was on the wane, and now, in the popular drama of our time, no profession is accorded so much respect as that of medicine. The cinema and television seldom show the doctor as anything but virtuous and responsible, in his youth sternly dedicated to his unimpeachable profession, in his latter years endowed with a wisdom to which no layman can aspire. This change in the "image" of the doctor is connected with the advances that medicine made in the course of the nineteenth century. From our present perspective these may seem small, but they are significant because they were the result of the development of biological knowledge—medicine began to school itself in the sciences as it never had before and seemed on the point of making good the claims of its effectiveness that for so long had been empty.

It was in this period of not unjustifiable optimism, when the common opinion of the medical profession moved toward becoming what it now is, that Shaw mounted the elaborate attack, which, beginning in his youth, was to continue through the greater part of his life. *The Doctor's Dilemma* is but one of his innumerable writings on medical subjects. They have been accused of error, extravagance and perversity, in part because of their polemic style, which is often intentionally outrageous. But they are remarkably well informed, and in the main they make excellent sense.

The essence of Shaw's indictment is that the medical profession turned every new idea it acquired into authoritative doctrine and then into dogma, with the result that even its most promising discoveries became barren and often dangerous. Other of its deficiencies also contributed to his viewing it as a "conspiracy against the public," but Shaw directed his most active antagonism toward that aspect of medicine which its practitioners had come to believe was its greatest strength, its reliance on scientific research. He held that exactly when medicine based itself most confidently on science it was most likely to prove unscientific, establishing orthodoxies which stood in the way of truth. If the charge has bearing even upon the medical situation in our day, when the acceleration of research condemns received ideas to a shorter expectancy of life than they once had, in Shaw's time its cogency was still greater. A case in point is the germ theory of disease as it was then formulated. This was of obvious value, yet it served as the ground for untenable conclusions (such as that virtually all diseases are caused by germs), mistaken beliefs (such as that vaccination provided permanent immunity from smallpox and was wholly without

¹ *The Origin of Attic Comedy.*

danger), and unsalutary practices (such as Lord Lister's use of surgical antiseptics, eventually abandoned because the antiseptic interfered with the healing process).

But the scientific inadequacy of its accepted theories was not the whole of the objection that Shaw made to the state of the medical profession. He was dismayed by what he took to be its philosophical or spiritual failure. Central to his thought was the doctrine of vitalism, which holds that the life of organisms is the manifestation of a vital principle distinct from all physical and chemical forces. It was a view that led him to deny categorically the first premise of the medical practice of his day, that the human body is a mechanism and that any malfunction it may show is to be dealt with in a mechanistic way. Shaw's belief in vitalism stood in close relation to his social views, for he held that disease is best understood as a result of adverse conditions in the environment, and that health depends on comfort and beauty, which society has the duty to provide.

Even this summary account of Shaw's dealings with medicine will suggest that he must have come to the writing of his comedy of doctors in a spirit quite different from that of his predecessors in the long tradition. It is not possible to attribute any propagandistic purpose to the earlier comic writers. They mocked doctors with no intention of exciting indignation, only laughter. Even Molière, whose satire so tellingly exposes the intellectual deficiencies of medicine, does not propose that anything in particular can or should be done about the bad state of affairs. As one critic puts it, comedy for Molière was not a means but an end. Shaw often said in the most explicit way that the opposite was true of him, that he intended his art not as an end in itself but as a means to an end, the betterment of human life. He proclaimed his pre-eminent concern with ideas, and with ideas that were "constructive" and practical, and his proudest boast was that he belonged to the company of what he called the "artist-philosophers," those men who, by means of their art, addressed themselves to bringing about a change in the condition of human life. He spoke scornfully of the "pure" artists, those who did not undertake to solve life's problems but were content to represent life as it is, for what merely pleasurable interest the representation might have. Among these he includes Shakespeare, whom he lovingly scolds because "he was utterly bewildered" by life and because his "pregnant observations and demonstrations of life are not co-ordinated into any philosophy or religion."

Yet if we take *The Doctor's Dilemma* quite by itself, without reference to its author's other writings about medicine,² and without regard to his characterization of himself as an "artist-philosopher," the effect of the play is really not different from that of a play of Molière's. Many of the specific ideas expounded in Shaw's polemical writings find expression in *The Doctor's Dilemma*, but we feel that they are there for the sake of the comedy rather than that the comedy was written to serve them. Such conclusions as we may draw from the play are not about medicine at all; they are, rather, about "life," and do not seem different in kind from the conclusions that Molière's plays frequently yield—that Nature and common sense are good and should guide our judg-

² Notable among them is the lengthy preface which Shaw wrote for the play when it was published in 1911. The large canon of what Shaw wrote about medicine over his lifetime is fully reviewed in Roger Boxill's admirable *Shaw and the Doctors*, a Columbia University dissertation.

ment; that committing oneself to a ruling idea goes against Nature and common sense and leads to error or defeat or ridicule, or all three; that a genial flexibility of mind is a virtue, and that intellectual pride is a vice; that thinking in the terms prescribed by one's profession leads to personal and intellectual deformation; that true morality transcends moralistic judgment; that affectionate and charitable emotions are to be cherished, self-seeking motives to be condemned. Comedy has traditionally permitted us to derive just such generalizations from its laughter. They have great charm, and no doubt they serve a good purpose in disposing us to virtue, but they cannot lay claim to great intellectual originality or force. They can scarcely be "co-ordinated into any philosophy or religion"; they are not what we expect of an "artist-philosopher."

In short, *The Doctor's Dilemma*, although it advertises Shaw's ideas about medicine, does not propound them with any great didactic power. On this occasion, the "pure" artist in Shaw seems to have overcome the "artist-philosopher," and the latter cannot have put up a very determined resistance. He would appear to have been quite content to surrender into the hands of undidactic comedy all the ideas he took so seriously in his polemical writings: his doctors are menaces to the public welfare only secondarily and in a way that does not seem to matter or in some aspect other than the one in which they stand before us; we see them as on the whole rather pleasant-natured men, who are to be laughed at for comedy's usual reasons, because they are fools, or monomaniacs, or self-deceivers. And the "artist-philosopher" goes so far in conspiring in his own defeat as to make a hopelessly "pure" artist the spokesman for his cherished vitalism.

Louis Dubedat is the embodiment of an idea that had considerable interest for people at the end of the nineteenth century, as it still does—that art is not required to serve morality, that it exists for its own sake and is thus a paradigm of life itself, which is also said to exist for its own sake, for no other reason than to delight in its own energy and beauty. A corollary is that the artist is not necessarily a virtuous person, that indeed he is typically *not* virtuous and that his indifference or hostility to moral considerations is a condition of his creative power. There is no more truth in this than there was in Ruskin's assertion that only a good man can produce good art, but the new notion of the amoral artist, like the more general idea which it paralleled, served to liberate people from certain rather glum notions about art that prevailed in the Victorian age. Shaw, it may be supposed, stood in an ambivalent relation to the new conception of art and the artist. His moral temper, which he was willing to call Puritan, rejected it; yet at the same time he could respond to it affirmatively because it spoke of the energy, freedom, and beauty that life ought properly to have, and also because it outraged the merely respectable morality of the middle class, which, depressing in itself, stood in the path of ameliorating change.

As an example of the artist who stands outside the considerations of morality, Dubedat is in some ways not an altogether satisfactory creation. His infractions of the moral code are all on a small scale. Almost everything he does is touched with slyness or meanness; petty deceit is his natural medium. He can outdo the doctors themselves in conventionality: there is reason to believe that he is perfectly sincere when he mocks them for supposing that Jennifer is not married to him, for not seeing that she is "a lady" who carries "her marriage certificate in her face and in her character." He is a snob and a

prig who can say of the girl he married under false pretenses that he could not stay with her long because she was "quite out of art and literature and refined living." And his stature as an artist is only little greater than as an immoralist; nothing that is said of his work leads us to believe that he is anything more than a brilliant and engaging but quite minor talent.

Dubedat's minuscule quality is in part dictated by the exigencies of comedy. If his stature were larger, if he enlisted our sympathies to a greater extent, his fate would be more moving than would have suited Shaw's purpose. As it is, his utterance of his "creed" on his deathbed creates an effect that, in its ambiguity, is quite in accord with the comic mode. When he folds his hands and affirms his belief "in Michael Angelo, Velasquez, and Rembrandt; in the might of design, the majesty of color, the redemption of all things by Beauty everlasting, and the message of Art that has made these hands blessed," the conscious pathetic eloquence of the speech is meant to mock itself, at least a little, and his subsequent question about the newspaper reporter is an obvious ironic comment on it. Yet for Shaw a creed is always momentous, especially one that speaks of redemption and a blessing, and Dubedat's death-bed avowal of faith makes the vitalistic affirmation of life that is meant to stand as the condemnation of Ridgeon and his mechanistic views.

The character of Ridgeon is puzzling almost to a fault. Upon first acquaintance we like him very much and from the description of him upon his entrance it is plain that Shaw meant that we should. The first check upon this approving opinion appears at the end of the second act, when, with the help of Sir Patrick Cullen, he is confronting his dilemma. Only for a short time is the dilemma allowed to be one of principle: whether to save the honest, decent, but not very useful doctor, Blenkinsop, or the "rotten blackguard" artist, Dubedat, "a genuine source of pretty and pleasant and good things." No sooner has the dilemma been stated in its interesting simplicity than Ridgeon introduces a complication that alters its nature: he discloses to Sir Patrick his desire to marry Dubedat's wife. This frankness we find admirable; by openly stating what he has to gain by allowing Dubedat to die, Ridgeon assures us that he is a man of wholly objective judgment. But our admiration cools when Sir Patrick says, "Perhaps she won't have you, you know," and Ridgeon answers, "I've a pretty good flair for that sort of thing. I know when a woman is interested in me. She is." There is of course no reason why Jennifer should *not* be "interested" in Ridgeon; a woman is likely to have some interested response to a man who is attractive, powerful, and drawn to her. And when, at the end of Act V, Jennifer, who is not exactly a girl, says that she had never been interested in him because he was too old—he is fifty—we may well feel that Shaw, in contriving this humiliation for Ridgeon, has made Jennifer trivial and undeveloped. Nonetheless, Ridgeon's answer to Sir Patrick, which is made "with a self-assured shake of the head," is vulgar and fatuous. The moral elevation that Ridgeon seemed about to gain by his frankness is no longer possible.

By the end of Act III, Ridgeon has become a sentimental self-deceiver, convincing himself that the motive for his decision to let Dubedat die is the noble desire to preserve Jennifer's illusions about her husband. In Act IV he speaks in a voice that Dubedat authoritatively describes as "devilish." But these manifestations of his moral decline do not carry conviction; they seem less the result of the character's inner life than of the author's manipulation.

SIX
CHARACTERS
IN SEARCH
OF AN AUTHOR
A Comedy in the Making

LUIGI PIRANDELLO

1867-1936

CHARACTERS OF THE COMEDY IN THE MAKING

THE FATHER
THE MOTHER
THE STEPDAUGHTER

THE SON
MADAME PACE
THE BOY
THE CHILD

} *These two do
not speak*

ACTORS OF THE COMPANY

THE MANAGER
LEADING LADY
LEADING MAN
SECOND LADY LEAD
L'INCÉNUÉ
JUVENILE LEAD

OTHER ACTORS AND ACTRESSES
PROPERTY MAN
PROMPTER
MACHINIST
MANAGER'S SECRETARY
DOORKEEPER
SCENE SHIFTERS

Daytime: The Stage of a Theater

ACT I

N.B. The Comedy is without acts or scenes. The performance is interrupted once, without the curtain being lowered, when the MANAGER and the chief characters withdraw to arrange the scenario. A second interruption of the action takes place when, by mistake, the stage hands let the curtain down.

The spectators will find the curtain raised and the stage as it usually is during the daytime. It will be half dark, and empty, so that from the beginning the public may have the impression of an impromptu performance.

PROMPTER's box and a small table and chair for the MANAGER.

Two other small tables and several chairs scattered about as during rehearsals.

The ACTORS and ACTRESSES of the company enter from the back of the stage:

First one, then another, then two together: nine or ten in all. They are about to rehearse a Pirandello play: Mixing It Up. Some of the company move off towards their dressing rooms. The PROMPTER who has the "book" under his arm, is waiting for the MANAGER in order to begin the rehearsal.

The ACTORS and ACTRESSES, some standing, some sitting, chat and smoke. One perhaps reads a paper; another cons his part.

Finally, the MANAGER enters and goes to the table prepared for him. His SECRETARY brings him his mail, through which he glances. The PROMPTER takes his seat, turns on a light, and opens the "book."

THE MANAGER [throwing a letter down on the table]. I can't see. [To PROPERTY MAN.] Let's have a little light, please!

PROPERTY MAN. Yes sir, yes, at once. [A light comes down on to the stage.]

THE MANAGER [clapping his hands]. Come along! Come along! Second act of Mixing It Up. [Sits down.]

[The ACTORS and ACTRESSES go from the front of the stage to the wings, all except the three who are to begin the rehearsal.]

THE PROMPTER [reading the "book"]. "Leo Gala's house. A curious room serving as dining-room and study."

THE MANAGER [to PROPERTY MAN]. Fix up the old red room.

PROPERTY MAN [noting it down]. Red set. All right!

THE PROMPTER [continuing to read from the "book"]. "Table already laid and writing desk with books and papers. Bookshelves. Exit rear to Leo's bedroom. Exit left to kitchen. Principal exit to right."

THE MANAGER [energetically]. Well, you understand: The principal exit over there; here the kitchen. [Turning to ACTOR who is to play the part of Socrates.] You make your entrances and exits here. [To PROPERTY MAN.] The baize doors at the rear, and curtains.

PROPERTY MAN [noting it down]. Right-o!

PROMPTER [reading as before]. "When the curtain rises, Leo Gala, dressed in cook's cap and apron is busy beating an egg in a cup. Philip, also dressed as a cook, is beating another egg. Guido Venanzi is seated and listening."

LEADING MAN [to MANAGER]. Excuse me, but must I absolutely wear a cook's cap?

THE MANAGER [*annoyed*]. I imagine so. It says so there anyway. [*Pointing to the "book."*]

LEADING MAN. But it's ridiculous!

THE MANAGER. Ridiculous? Ridiculous? Is it my fault if France won't send us any more good comedies, and we are reduced to putting on Pirandello's works, where nobody understands anything, and where the author plays the fool with us all? [*The ACTORS grin. The MANAGER goes to LEADING MAN and shouts.*] Yes sir, you put on the cook's cap and beat eggs. Do you suppose that with all this egg-beating business you are on an ordinary stage? Get that out of your head. You represent the shell of the eggs you are beating! [*Laughter and comments among the ACTORS.*] Silence! and listen to my explanations, please! [*To LEADING MAN.*] "The empty form of reason without the fullness of instinct, which is blind"—You stand for reason, your wife is instinct. It's a mixing up of the parts, according to which you who act your own part become the puppet of yourself. Do you understand?

LEADING MAN. I'm hanged if I do.

THE MANAGER. Neither do I. But let's get on with it. It's sure to be a glorious failure anyway. [*Confidentially.*] But I say, please face three-quarters. Otherwise, what with the abstruseness of the dialogue, and the public that won't be able to hear you, the whole thing will go to hell. Come on! come on!

PROMPTER. Pardon sir, may I get into my box? There's a bit of a draught.

THE MANAGER. Yes, yes, of course!

[*At this point, the DOORKEEPER has entered from the stage door and advances towards the MANAGER's table, taking off his braided cap. During this manoeuvre, the SIX CHARACTERS enter, and stop by the door at back of stage, so that when the DOORKEEPER is about to announce their coming to the MANAGER, they are already on the stage. A tenuous light surrounds them, almost as if irradiated by them—the faint breath of their fantastic reality.*]

This light will disappear when they come forward towards the ACTORS. They preserve, however, something of the dream lightness in which they seem almost suspended; but this does not detract from the essential reality of their forms and expressions.

He who is known as the FATHER is a man of about 50: hair, reddish in color, thin at the temples; he is not bald, however; thick moustaches, falling over his still fresh mouth, which often opens in an empty and uncertain smile. He is fattish, pale; with an especially wide forehead. He has blue, oval-shaped eyes, very clear and piercing. Wears light trousers and a dark jacket. He is alternately mellifluous and violent in his manner.

The MOTHER seems crushed and terrified as if by an intolerable weight of shame and abasement. She is dressed in modest black and wears a thick widow's veil of crêpe. When she lifts this, she reveals a wax-like face. She always keeps her eyes downcast.

The STEPDAUGHTER is dashing, almost impudent, beautiful. She wears mourning too, but with great elegance. She shows contempt for the timid half-frightened manner of the wretched BOY (14 years old, and also dressed in black); on the other hand, she displays a lively tenderness for her little sister, the CHILD (about four), who is dressed in white, with a black silk sash at the waist.

The SON (22) tall, severe in his attitude of contempt for the FATHER,

supercilious and indifferent to the MOTHER. He looks as if he had come on the stage against his will.]

DOORKEEPER [*cap in hand*]. Excuse me, sir . . .

THE MANAGER [*rudely*]. Eh? What is it?

DOORKEEPER [*timidly*]. These people are asking for you, sir.

THE MANAGER [*furiously*]. I am rehearsing, and you know perfectly well no one's allowed to come in during rehearsals! [*Turning to the CHARACTERS.*] Who are you, please? What do you want?

THE FATHER [*coming forward a little, followed by the others who seem embarrassed*]. As a matter of fact . . . we have come here in search of an author. . . .

THE MANAGER [*half angry, half amazed*]. An author? What author?

THE FATHER. Any author, sir.

THE MANAGER. But there's no author here. We are not rehearsing a new piece.

THE STEPDAUGHTER [*vivaciously*]. So much the better, so much the better! We can be your new piece.

AN ACTOR [*coming forward from the others*]. Oh, do you hear that?

THE FATHER [*to STEPDAUGHTER*]. Yes, but if the author isn't here . . . [*to MANAGER.*] . . . unless you would be willing . . .

THE MANAGER. You are trying to be funny.

THE FATHER. No, for Heaven's sake, what are you saying? We bring you a drama, sir.

THE STEPDAUGHTER. We may be your fortune.

THE MANAGER. Will you oblige me by going away? We haven't time to waste with mad people.

THE FATHER [*mellifluously*]. Oh sir, you know well that life is full of infinite absurdities, which, strangely enough, do not even need to appear plausible, since they are true.

THE MANAGER. What the devil is he talking about?

THE FATHER. I say that to reverse the ordinary process may well be considered a madness: that is, to create credible situations, in order that they may appear true. But permit me to observe that if this be madness, it is the sole *raison d'être* of your profession, gentlemen. [*The ACTORS look hurt and perplexed.*]

THE MANAGER [*getting up and looking at him*]. So our profession seems to you one worthy of madmen then?

THE FATHER. Well, to make seem true that which isn't true . . . without any need . . . for a joke as it were . . . Isn't that your mission, gentlemen: to give life to fantastic characters on the stage?

THE MANAGER [*interpreting the rising anger of the COMPANY*]. But I would beg you to believe, my dear sir, that the profession of the comedian is a noble one. If today, as things go, the playwrights give us stupid comedies to play and puppets to represent instead of men, remember we are proud to have given life to immortal works here on these very boards! [*The ACTORS, satisfied, applaud their MANAGER.*]

THE FATHER [*interrupting furiously*]. Exactly, perfectly, to living beings more alive than those who breathe and wear clothes: being less real perhaps,

but truer! I agree with you entirely. [*The ACTORS look at one another in amazement.*]

THE MANAGER. But what do you mean? Before, you said . . .

THE FATHER. No, excuse me, I meant it for you, sir, who were crying out that you had no time to lose with madmen, while no one better than yourself knows that nature uses the instrument of human fantasy in order to pursue her high creative purpose.

THE MANAGER. Very well—but where does all this take us?

THE FATHER. Nowhere! It is merely to show you that one is born to life in many forms, in many shapes, as tree, or as stone, as water, as butterfly, or as woman. So one may also be born a character in a play.

THE MANAGER [*with feigned comic dismay*]. So you and these other friends of yours have been born characters?

THE FATHER. Exactly, and alive as you see! [*MANAGER and ACTORS burst out laughing.*]

THE FATHER [*hurt*]. I am sorry you laugh, because we carry in us a drama, as you can guess from this woman here veiled in black.

THE MANAGER [*losing patience at last and almost indignant*]. Oh, chuck it! Get away please! Clear out of here! [*To PROPERTY MAN.*] For Heaven's sake, turn them out!

THE FATHER [*resisting*]. No, no, look here, we . . .

THE MANAGER [*roaring*]. We come here to work, you know.

LEADING ACTOR. One cannot let oneself be made such a fool of.

THE FATHER [*determined, coming forward*]. I marvel at your incredulity, gentlemen. Are you not accustomed to see the characters created by an author spring to life in yourselves and face each other? Just because there is no "book" [*pointing to the PROMPTER's box.*] which contains us, you refuse to believe . . .

THE STEPDAUGHTER [*advances towards MANAGER, smiling and coquettish*]. Believe me, we are really six most interesting characters, sir; side-tracked however.

THE FATHER. Yes, that is the word! [*To MANAGER all at once.*] In the sense, that is, that the author who created us alive no longer wished, or was no longer able, materially to put us into a work of art. And this was a real crime, sir; because he who has had the luck to be born a character can laugh even at death. He cannot die. The man, the writer, the instrument of the creation will die, but his creation does not die. And to live for ever, it does not need to have extraordinary gifts or to be able to work wonders. Who was Sancho Panza? Who was Don Abbondio? Yet they live eternally because—live germs as they were—they had the fortune to find a fecundating matrix, a fantasy which could raise and nourish them: make them live for ever!

THE MANAGER. That is quite all right. But what do you want here, all of you?

THE FATHER. We want to live.

THE MANAGER [*ironically*]. For Eternity?

THE FATHER. No, sir, only for a moment . . . in you.

AN ACTOR. Just listen to him!

LEADING LADY. They want to live, in us! . . .

JUVENILE LEAD [*pointing to the STEPDAUGHTER*]. I've no objection, as far as that one is concerned!

THE FATHER. Look here! Look here! The comedy has to be made. [*To the MANAGER.*] But if you and your actors are willing, we can soon concert it among ourselves.

THE MANAGER [*annoyed*]. But what do you want to concert? We don't go in for concerts here. Here we play dramas and comedies!

THE FATHER. Exactly! That is just why we have come to you.

THE MANAGER. And where is the "book"?

THE FATHER. It is in us! [*The ACTORS laugh.*] The drama is in us, and we are the drama. We are impatient to play it. Our inner passion drives us on to this.

THE STEPDAUGHTER [*disdainful, alluring, treacherous, full of impudence*]. My passion, sir! Ah, if you only knew! My passion for him! [*Points to the FATHER and makes a pretence of embracing him. Then she breaks out into a loud laugh.*]

THE FATHER [*angrily*]. Behave yourself! And please don't laugh in that fashion.

THE STEPDAUGHTER. With your permission, gentlemen, I, who am a two months' orphan, will show you how I can dance and sing. [*Sings and then dances "Prenez garde à Tchou-Tchin-Tchou."*]

Les chinois sont un peuple malin,
De Shanghai à Pékin,
Ils ont mis des écriteaux partout:
Prenez garde à Tchou-Tchin-Tchou.¹

ACTORS and ACTRESSES. Bravo! Well done! Tip-top!

THE MANAGER. Silence! This isn't a café concert, you know! [*Turning to the FATHER in consternation.*] Is she mad?

THE FATHER. Mad? No, she's worse than mad.

THE STEPDAUGHTER [*to MANAGER*]. Worse? Worse? Listen! Stage this drama for us at once! Then you will see that at a certain moment I . . . when this little darling here . . . [*Takes the CHILD by the hand and leads her to the MANAGER.*] Isn't she a dear? [*Takes her up and kisses her.*] Darling! Darling! [*Puts her down again and adds feelingly.*] Well, when God suddenly takes this dear little child away from that poor mother there; and this imbecile here [*seizing hold of the BOY roughly and pushing him forward*] does the stupidest things, like the fool he is, you will see me run away. Yes, gentlemen, I shall be off. But the moment hasn't arrived yet. After what has taken place between him and me [*indicates the FATHER with a horrible wink*] I can't remain any longer in this society, to have to witness the anguish of this mother here for that fool . . . [*Indicates the SON.*] Look at him! Look at him! See how indifferent, how frigid he is, because he is the legitimate son. He despises me, despises him [*pointing to the BOY*], despises this baby here; because . . . we are bastards. [*Goes to the MOTHER and embraces her.*] And he doesn't want to recognize her as his mother—she who is the common mother of us all. He looks down upon her as if she were only the mother of us three bastards. Wretch! [*She says all this very*

¹ The Chinese are clever people,
From Shanghai to Peking,
They've put billboards everywhere:
Hearken to Tchou-Tchin-Tchou.
(French ditty)

rapidly, excitedly. At the word "bastards" she raises her voice, and almost spits out the final "Wretch!"

THE MOTHER [*to the MANAGER, in anguish*]. In the name of these two little children, I beg you . . . [*She grows faint and is about to fall.*] Oh God!

THE FATHER [*coming forward to support her as do some of the ACTORS*]. Quick a chair, a chair for this poor widow!

THE ACTORS. Is it true? Has she really fainted?

THE MANAGER. Quick, a chair! Here!

[*One of the ACTORS brings a chair, the others proffer assistance. The MOTHER tries to prevent the FATHER from lifting the veil which covers her face.*]

THE FATHER. Look at her! Look at her!

THE MOTHER. No, stop; stop it please!

THE FATHER [*raising her veil*]. Let them see you!

THE MOTHER [*rising and covering her face with her hands, in desperation*]. I beg you, sir, to prevent this man from carrying out his plan which is loathsome to me.

THE MANAGER [*dumbfounded*]. I don't understand at all. What is the situation? Is this lady your wife? [*To the FATHER.*]

THE FATHER. Yes, gentlemen: my wife!

THE MANAGER. But how can she be a widow if you are alive? [*The ACTORS find relief for their astonishment in a loud laugh.*]

THE FATHER. Don't laugh! Don't laugh like that, for Heaven's sake. Her drama lies just here in this: she has had a lover, a man who ought to be here.

THE MOTHER [*with a cry*]. No! No!

THE STEPDAUGHTER. Fortunately for her, he is dead. Two months ago as I said. We are in mourning, as you see.

THE FATHER. He isn't here you see, not because he is dead. He isn't here—look at her a moment and you will understand—because her drama isn't a drama of the love of two men for whom she was incapable of feeling anything except possibly a little gratitude—gratitude not for me but for the other. She isn't a woman, she is a mother, and her drama—powerful sir, I assure you—lies, as a matter of fact, all in these four children she has had by two men.

THE MOTHER. I had them? Have you got the courage to say that I wanted them? [*To the COMPANY.*] It was his doing. It was he who gave me that other man, who forced me to go away with him.

THE STEPDAUGHTER. It isn't true.

THE MOTHER [*startled*]. Not true, isn't it?

THE STEPDAUGHTER. No, it isn't true, it just isn't true.

THE MOTHER. And what can you know about it?

THE STEPDAUGHTER. It isn't true. Don't believe it. [*To MANAGER*] Do you know why she says so? For that fellow there. [*Indicates the SON.*] She tortures herself, destroys herself on account of the neglect of that son there; and she wants him to believe that if she abandoned him when he was only two years old, it was because he [*indicates the FATHER*] made her do so.

THE MOTHER [*vigorously*]. He forced me to it, and I call God to witness it. [*To the MANAGER.*] Ask him [*indicates the FATHER*] if it isn't true. Let him speak. You [*to DAUGHTER*] are not in a position to know anything about it.

THE STEPDAUGHTER. I know you lived in peace and happiness with my father while he lived. Can you deny it?

THE MOTHER. No, I don't deny it . . .

THE STEPDAUGHTER. He was always full of affection and kindness for you. [*To the BOY, angrily.*] It's true, isn't it? Tell them! Why don't you speak, you little fool?

THE MOTHER. Leave the poor boy alone. Why do you want to make me appear ungrateful, daughter? I don't want to offend your father. I have answered him that I didn't abandon my house and my son through any fault of mine, nor from any wilful passion.

THE FATHER. It is true. It was my doing.

LEADING MAN [*to the COMPANY*]. What a spectacle!

LEADING LADY. We are the audience this time.

JUVENILE LEAD. For once, in a way.

THE MANAGER [*beginning to get really interested*]. Let's hear them out. Listen!

THE SON. Oh yes, you're going to hear a fine bit now. He will talk to you of the Demon of Experiment.

THE FATHER. You are a cynical imbecile. I've told you so already a hundred times. [*To the MANAGER.*] He tries to make fun of me on account of this expression which I have found to excuse myself with.

THE SON [*with disgust*]. Yes, phrases! phrases!

THE FATHER. Phrases! Isn't everyone consoled when faced with a trouble or fact he doesn't understand, by a word, some simple word, which tells us nothing and yet calms us?

THE STEPDAUGHTER. Even in the case of remorse. In fact, especially then.

THE FATHER. Remorse? No, that isn't true. I've done more than use words to quieten the remorse in me.

THE STEPDAUGHTER. Yes, there was a bit of money too. Yes, yes, a bit of money. There were the hundred lire he was about to offer me in payment, gentlemen. . . . [*Sensation of horror among the ACTORS.*]

THE SON [*to the STEPDAUGHTER*]. This is vile.

THE STEPDAUGHTER. Vile? There they were in a pale blue envelope on a little mahogany table in the back of Madame Pace's shop. You know Madame Pace—one of those ladies who attract poor girls of good family into their ateliers, under the pretext of their selling *robes et manteaux*.²

THE SON. And he thinks he has bought the right to tyrannize over us all with those hundred lire he was going to pay; but which, fortunately—note this, gentlemen—he had no chance of paying.

THE STEPDAUGHTER. It was a near thing, though, you know! [*Laughs ironically.*]

THE MOTHER [*protesting*]. Shame, my daughter, shame!

THE STEPDAUGHTER. Shame indeed! This is my revenge! I am dying to live that scene. . . . The room . . . I see it . . . Here is the window with the mantles exposed, there the divan, the looking-glass, a screen, there in front of the window the little mahogany table with the blue envelope containing one hundred lire. I see it. I see it. I could take hold of it . . . But you, gentlemen, you ought to turn your backs now: I am almost nude, you know. But I don't blush: I leave that to him [*indicating the FATHER*].

² (French) Dresses and coats.

THE MANAGER. I don't understand this at all.

THE FATHER. Naturally enough. I would ask you, sir, to exercise your authority a little here, and let me speak before you believe all she is trying to blame me with. Let me explain.

THE STEPDAUGHTER. Ah yes, explain it in your own way.

THE FATHER. But don't you see that the whole trouble lies here. In words, words. Each one of us has within him a whole world of things, each man of us his own special world. And how can we ever come to an understanding if I put in the words I utter the sense and value of things as I see them; while you who listen to me must inevitably translate them according to the conception of things each one of you has within himself. We think we understand each other, but we never really do. Look here! This woman [*indicating the MOTHER*] takes all my pity for her as a specially ferocious form of cruelty.

THE MOTHER. But you drove me away.

THE FATHER. Do you hear her? I drove her away! She believes I really sent her away.

THE MOTHER. You know how to talk, and I don't; but, believe me, sir [*to MANAGER*], after he had married me . . . who knows why? . . . I was a poor insignificant woman . . .

THE FATHER. But, good Heaven! it was just for your humility that I married you. I loved this simplicity in you. [*He stops when he sees she makes signs to contradict him, opens his arms wide in sign of desperation, seeing how hopeless it is to make himself understood.*] You see she denies it. Her mental deafness, believe me, is phenomenal, the limit [*touches his forehead*]: deaf, deaf, mentally deaf! She has plenty of feeling. Oh yes, a good heart for the children, but the brain—deaf, to the point of desperation—!

THE STEPDAUGHTER. Yes, but ask him how his intelligence has helped us.

THE FATHER. If we could see all the evil that may spring from good, what should we do? [*At this point the LEADING LADY who is biting her lips with rage at seeing the LEADING MAN flirting with the STEPDAUGHTER, comes forward and says to the MANAGER*]

LEADING LADY. Excuse me, but are we going to rehearse today?

MANAGER. Of course, of course; but let's hear them out.

JUVENILE LEAD. This is something quite new.

L'INCÉNUÉ. Most interesting!

LEADING LADY. Yes, for the people who like that kind of thing. [*Casts a glance at LEADING MAN.*]

THE MANAGER [*to FATHER*]. You must please explain yourself quite clearly. [*Sits down.*]

THE FATHER. Very well then: listen! I had in my service a poor man, a clerk, a secretary of mine, full of devotion, who became friends with her. [*Indicating the MOTHER.*] They understood one another, were kindred souls in fact, without, however, the least suspicion of any evil existing. They were incapable even of thinking of it.

THE STEPDAUGHTER. So he thought of it—for them!

THE FATHER. That's not true. I meant to do good to them—and to myself, I confess, at the same time. Things had come to the point that I could not say a word to either of them without their making a mute appeal, one to the other, with their eyes. I could see them silently asking each other how I was to be

kept in countenance, how I was to be kept quiet. And this, believe me, was just about enough of itself to keep me in a constant rage, to exasperate me beyond measure.

THE MANAGER. And why didn't you send him away then—this secretary of yours?

THE FATHER. Precisely what I did, sir. And then I had to watch this poor woman drifting forlornly about the house like an animal without a master, like an animal one has taken in out of pity.

THE MOTHER. Ah yes! . . .

THE FATHER [*suddenly turning to the MOTHER*]. It's true about the son anyway, isn't it?

THE MOTHER. He took my son away from me first of all.

THE FATHER. But not from cruelty. I did it so that he should grow up healthy and strong by living in the country.

THE STEPDAUGHTER [*pointing to him ironically*]. As one can see.

THE FATHER [*quickly*]. Is it my fault if he has grown up like this? I sent him to a wet nurse in the country, a peasant, as *she* did not seem to me strong enough, though she is of humble origin. That was, anyway, the reason I married her. Unpleasant all this may be, but how can it be helped? My mistake possibly, but there we are! All my life I have had these confounded aspirations towards a certain moral sanity. [*At this point the STEPDAUGHTER bursts out into a noisy laugh.*] Oh, stop it! Stop it! I can't stand it.

THE MANAGER. Yes, please stop it, for Heaven's sake.

THE STEPDAUGHTER. But imagine moral sanity from him, if you please—the client of certain ateliers like that of Madame Pace!

THE FATHER. Fool! That is the proof that I am a man! This seeming contradiction, gentlemen, is the strongest proof that I stand here a live man before you. Why, it is just for this very incongruity in my nature that I have had to suffer what I have. I could not live by the side of that woman [*indicating the MOTHER*] any longer; but not so much for the boredom she inspired me with as for the pity I felt for her.

THE MOTHER. And so he turned me out—.

THE FATHER. —well provided for! Yes, I sent her to that man, gentlemen . . . to let her go free of me.

THE MOTHER. And to free himself.

THE FATHER. Yes, I admit it. It was also a liberation for me. But great evil has come of it. I meant well when I did it; and I did it more for her sake than mine. I swear it. [*Crosses his arms on his chest; then turns suddenly to the MOTHER.*] Did I ever lose sight of you until that other man carried you off to another town, like the angry fool he was? And on account of my pure interest in you . . . my pure interest, I repeat, that had no base motive in it . . . I watched with the tenderest concern the new family that grew up around her. She can bear witness to this. [*Points to the STEPDAUGHTER.*]

THE STEPDAUGHTER. Oh yes, that's true enough. When I was a kiddie, so so high, you know, with plaits over my shoulders and knickers longer than my skirts, I used to see him waiting outside the school for me to come out. He came to see how I was growing up.

THE FATHER. This is infamous, shameful!

THE STEPDAUGHTER. No. Why?

THE FATHER. Infamous! Infamous! [*Then excitedly to MANAGER, explaining.*] After she [*indicating MOTHER*] went away, my house seemed suddenly empty. She was my incubus, but she filled my house. I was like a dazed fly alone in the empty rooms. This boy here [*indicating the SON*] was educated away from home, and when he came back, he seemed to me to be no more mine. With no mother to stand between him and me, he grew up entirely for himself, on his own, apart, with no tie of intellect or affection binding him to me. And then—strange but true—I was driven, by curiosity at first and then by some tender sentiment, towards her family, which had come into being through my will. The thought of her began gradually to fill up the emptiness I felt all around me. I wanted to know if she were happy in living out the simple daily duties of life. I wanted to think of her as fortunate and happy because far away from the complicated torments of my spirit. And so, to have proof of this, I used to watch that child coming out of school.

THE STEPDAUGHTER. Yes, yes. True. He used to follow me in the street and smiled at me, waved his hand, like this. I would look at him with interest, wondering who he might be. I told my mother, who guessed at once. [*The MOTHER agrees with a nod.*] Then she didn't want to send me to school for some days; and when I finally went back, there he was again—looking so ridiculous—with a paper parcel in his hands. He came close to me, caressed me, and drew out a fine straw hat from the parcel, with a bouquet of flowers—all for me!

THE MANAGER. A bit discursive this, you know!

THE SON [*contemptuously*]. Literature! Literature!

THE FATHER. Literature indeed! This is life, this is passion!

THE MANAGER. It may be, but it won't act.

THE FATHER. I agree. This is only the part leading up. I don't suggest this should be staged. She [*pointing to the STEPDAUGHTER*], as you see, is no longer the flapper with plaits down her back—.

THE STEPDAUGHTER. —and the knickers showing below the skirt!

THE FATHER. The drama is coming now, sir; something new, complex, most interesting.

THE STEPDAUGHTER. As soon as my father died . . .

THE FATHER. —there was absolute misery for them. They came back here, unknown to me. Through her stupidity! [*Pointing to the MOTHER.*] It is true she can barely write her own name; but she could anyhow have got her daughter to write to me that they were in need. . . .

THE MOTHER. And how was I to divine all this sentiment in him?

THE FATHER. That is exactly your mistake, never to have guessed any of my sentiments.

THE MOTHER. After so many years apart, and all that had happened . . .

THE FATHER. Was it my fault if that fellow carried you away? It happened quite suddenly; for after he had obtained some job or other, I could find no trace of them; and so, not unnaturally, my interest in them dwindled. But the drama culminated unforeseen and violent on their return, when I was impelled by my miserable flesh that still lives . . . Ah! what misery, what wretchedness is that of the man who is alone and disdains debasing *liaisons*! Not old enough to do without women, and not young enough to go and look for one without shame. Misery? It's worse than misery; it's a horror; for no woman can any longer give him love; and when a man feels this . . . One ought to do with-

out, you say? Yes, yes, I know. Each of us when he appears before his fellows is clothed in a certain dignity. But every man knows what unconfessable things pass within the secrecy of his own heart. One gives way to the temptation, only to rise from it again, afterwards, with a great eagerness to reestablish one's dignity, as if it were a tombstone to place on the grave of one's shame, and a monument to hide and sign the memory of our weaknesses. Everybody's in the same case. Some folks haven't the courage to say certain things, that's all!

THE STEPDAUGHTER. All appear to have the courage to do them though.

THE FATHER. Yes, but in secret. Therefore, you want more courage to say these things. Let a man but speak these things out, and folks at once label him a cynic. But it isn't true. He is like all the others, better indeed, because he isn't afraid to reveal with the light of the intelligence the red shame of human bestiality on which most men close their eyes so as not to see it. Woman—for example, look at her case! She turns tantalizing inviting glances on you. You seize her. No sooner does she feel herself in your grasp than she closes her eyes. It is the sign of her mission, the sign by which she says to man: "Blind yourself, for I am blind."

THE STEPDAUGHTER. Sometimes she can close them no more: when she no longer feels the need of hiding her shame to herself, but dry-eyed and dispassionately, sees only that of the man who has blinded himself without love. Oh, all these intellectual complications make me sick, disgust me—all his philosophy that uncovers the beast in man, and then seeks to save him, excuse him . . . I can't stand it, sir. When a man seeks to "simplify" life bestially, throwing aside every relic of humanity, every chaste aspiration, every pure feeling, all sense of ideality, duty, modesty, shame . . . then nothing is more revolting and nauseous than a certain kind of remorse—crocodiles' tears, that's what it is.

THE MANAGER. Let's come to the point. This is only discussion.

THE FATHER. Very good, sir! But a fact is like a sack which won't stand up when it is empty. In order that it may stand up, one has to put into it the reason and sentiment which have caused it to exist. I couldn't possibly know that after the death of that man, they had decided to return here, that they were in misery, and that she [*pointing to the MOTHER*] had gone to work as a modiste, and at a shop of the type of that of Madame Pace.

THE STEPDAUGHTER. A real high-class modiste, you must know, gentlemen. In appearance, she works for the leaders of the best society; but she arranges matters so that these elegant ladies serve her purpose . . . without prejudice to other ladies who are . . . well . . . only so so.

THE MOTHER. You will believe me, gentlemen, that it never entered my mind that the old hag offered me work because she had her eye on my daughter.

THE STEPDAUGHTER. Poor mamma! Do you know, sir, what that woman did when I brought her back the work my mother had finished? She would point out to me that I had torn one of my frocks, and she would give it back to my mother to mend. It was I who paid for it, always I; while this poor creature here believed she was sacrificing herself for me and these two children here, sitting up at night sewing Madame Pace's robes.

THE MANAGER. And one day you met there . . .

THE STEPDAUGHTER. Him, him. Yes, sir, an old client. There's a scene for you to play! Superb!

THE FATHER. She, the Mother arrived just then . . .

THE STEPDAUGHTER [*treacherously*]. Almost in time!

THE FATHER [*crying out*]. No, in time! in time! Fortunately I recognized her . . . in time. And I took them back home with me to my house. You can imagine now her position and mine: she, as you see her; and I who cannot look her in the face.

THE STEPDAUGHTER. Absurd! How can I possibly be expected—after that—to be a modest young miss, a fit person to go with his confounded aspirations for “a solid moral sanity”?

THE FATHER. For the drama lies all in this—in the conscience that I have, that each one of us has. We believe this conscience to be a single thing, but it is many-sided. There is one for this person, and another for that. Diverse consciences. So we have this illusion of being one person for all, of having a personality that is unique in all our acts. But it isn't true. We perceive this when, tragically perhaps, in something we do, we are, as it were, suspended, caught up in the air on a kind of hook. Then we perceive that all of us was not in that act, and that it would be an atrocious injustice to judge us by that action alone, as if all our existence were summed up in that one deed. Now do you understand the perfidy of this girl? She surprised me in a place, where she ought not to have known me, just as I could not exist for her; and she now seeks to attach to me a reality such as I could never suppose I should have to assume for her in a shameful and fleeting moment of my life. I feel this above all else. And the drama, you will see, acquires a tremendous value from this point. Then there is the position of the others . . . his . . . [*Indicating the SON.*]

THE SON [*shrugging his shoulders scornfully*]. Leave me alone! I don't come into this.

THE FATHER. What? You don't come into this?

THE SON. I've got nothing to do with it, and don't want to have; because you know well enough I wasn't made to be mixed up in all this with the rest of you.

THE STEPDAUGHTER. We are only vulgar folk! He is the fine gentleman. You may have noticed, Mr. Manager, that I fix him now and again with a look of scorn while he lowers his eyes—for he knows the evil he has done me.

THE SON [*scarcely looking at her*]. I?

THE STEPDAUGHTER. You! you! I owe my life on the streets to you. Did you or did you not deny us, with your behavior, I won't say the intimacy of home, but even that mere hospitality which makes guests feel at their ease? We were intruders who had come to disturb the kingdom of your legitimacy. I should like to have you witness, Mr. Manager, certain scenes between him and me. He says I have tyrannized over everyone. But it was just his behavior which made me insist on the reason for which I had come into the house—this reason he calls “vile”—into his house, with my mother who is his mother too. And I came as mistress of the house.

THE SON. It's easy for them to put me always in the wrong. But imagine, gentlemen, the position of a son, whose fate it is to see arrive one day at his home a young woman of impudent bearing, a young woman who inquires for his father, with whom who knows what business she has. This young man has then to witness her return bolder than ever, accompanied by that child there. He is obliged to watch her treat his father in an equivocal and confidential

manner. She asks money of him in a way that lets one suppose he must give it her, *must*, do you understand, because he has every obligation to do so.

THE FATHER. But I have, as a matter of fact, this obligation. I owe it to your mother.

THE SON. How should I know? When had I ever seen or heard of her? One day there arrive with her [*indicating STEPDAUGHTER*] that lad and this baby here. I am told: "This is *your* mother too, you know." I divine from her manner [*indicating STEPDAUGHTER again*] why it is they have come home. I had rather not say what I feel and think about it. I shouldn't even care to confess to myself. No action can therefore be hoped for from me in this affair. Believe me, Mr. Manager, I am an "unrealized" character, dramatically speaking; and I find myself not at all at ease in their company. Leave me out of it I beg you.

THE FATHER. What? It is just because you are so that . . .

THE SON. How do you know what I am like? When did you ever bother your head about me?

THE FATHER. I admit it. I admit it. But isn't that a situation in itself? This aloofness of yours which is so cruel to me and to your mother, who returns home and sees you almost for the first time grown up, who doesn't recognize you but knows you are her son . . . [*Pointing out the MOTHER to the MANAGER.*] See, she's crying!

THE STEPDAUGHTER [*angrily, stamping her foot*]. Like a fool!

THE FATHER [*indicating STEPDAUGHTER*]. She can't stand him you know. [*Then referring again to the SON.*] He says he doesn't come into the affair, whereas he is really the hinge of the whole action. Look at that lad who is always clinging to his mother, frightened and humiliated. It is on account of this fellow here. Possibly his situation is the most painful of all. He feels himself a stranger more than the others. The poor little chap feels mortified, humiliated at being brought into a home out of charity as it were. [*In confidence.*] He is the image of his father. Hardly talks at all. Humble and quiet.

THE MANAGER. Oh, we'll cut him out. You've no notion what a nuisance boys are on the stage . . .

THE FATHER. He disappears soon, you know. And the baby too. She is the first to vanish from the scene. The drama consists finally in this: when that mother re-enters my house, her family born outside of it, and shall we say superimposed on the original, ends with the death of the little girl, the tragedy of the boy and the flight of the elder daughter. It cannot go on, because it is foreign to its surroundings. So after much torment, we three remain: I, the mother, that son. Then, owing to the disappearance of that extraneous family, we too find ourselves strange to one another. We find we are living in an atmosphere of mortal desolation which is the revenge, as he [*indicating SON*] scornfully said of the Demon of Experiment, that unfortunately hides in me. Thus, sir, you see when faith is lacking, it becomes impossible to create certain states of happiness, for we lack the necessary humility. Vaingloriously, we try to substitute ourselves for this faith, creating thus for the rest of the world a reality which we believe after this fashion, while, actually, it doesn't exist. For each one of us has his own reality to be respected before God, even when it is harmful to one's very self.

THE MANAGER. There is something in what you say. I assure you all this

interests me very much. I begin to think there's the stuff for a drama in all this, and not a bad drama either.

THE STEPDAUGHTER [*coming forward*]. When you've got a character like me.

THE FATHER [*shutting her up, all excited to learn the decision of the MANAGER*]. You be quiet!

THE MANAGER [*reflecting, heedless of interruption*]. It's new . . . hem . . . yes . . .

THE FATHER. Absolutely new!

THE MANAGER. You've got a nerve though, I must say, to come here and fling it at me like this . . .

THE FATHER. You will understand, sir, born as we are for the stage . . .

THE MANAGER. Are you amateur actors then?

THE FATHER. No, I say born for the stage, because . . .

THE MANAGER. Oh, nonsense. You're an old hand, you know.

THE FATHER. No sir, no. We act that rôle for which we have been cast, that rôle which we are given in life. And in my own case, passion itself, as usually happens, becomes a trifle theatrical when it is exalted.

THE MANAGER. Well, well, that will do. But you see, without an author . . . I could give you the address of an author if you like.

THE FATHER. No, no. Look here! You must be the author.

THE MANAGER. I? What are you talking about?

THE FATHER. Yes, you! Why not?

THE MANAGER. Because I have never been an author: that's why.

THE FATHER. Then why not turn author now? Everybody does it. You don't want any special qualities. Your task is made much easier by the fact that we are all here alive before you . . .

THE MANAGER. It won't do.

THE FATHER. What? When you see us live our drama . . .

THE MANAGER. Yes, that's all right. But you want someone to write it.

THE FATHER. No, no. Someone to take it down, possibly, while we play it, scene by scene! It will be enough to sketch it out at first, and then try it over.

THE MANAGER. Well . . . I am almost tempted. It's a bit of an idea. One might have a shot at it.

THE FATHER. Of course. You'll see what scenes will come out of it. I can give you one, at once . . .

THE MANAGER. By Jove, it tempts me. I'd like to have a go at it. Let's try it out. Come with me to my office. [*Turning to the ACTORS.*] You are at liberty for a bit, but don't stop out of the theater for long. In a quarter of an hour, twenty minutes, all back here again! [*To the FATHER.*] We'll see what can be done. Who knows if we don't get something really extraordinary out of it?

THE FATHER. There's no doubt about it. They [*indicating the CHARACTERS.*] had better come with us too, hadn't they?

THE MANAGER. Yes, yes. Come on! come on! [*Moves away and then turning to the ACTORS.*] Be punctual, please! [*MANAGER and the SIX CHARACTERS cross the stage and go off. The other ACTORS remain, looking at one another in astonishment.*]

LEADING MAN. Is he serious? What the devil does he want to do?

JUVENILE LEAD. This is rank madness.

THIRD ACTOR. Does he expect to knock up a drama in five minutes?

JUVENILE LEAD. Like the improvisers!

LEADING LADY. If he thinks I'm going to take part in a joke like this . . .

JUVENILE LEAD. I'm out of it anyway.

FOURTH ACTOR. I should like to know who they are. [*Alludes to CHARACTERS.*]

THIRD ACTOR. What do you suppose? Madmen or rascals!

JUVENILE LEAD. And he takes them seriously!

L'INCÉNUÉ. Vanity! He fancies himself as an author now.

LEADING MAN. It's absolutely unheard of. If the stage has come to this . . . well I'm . . .

FIFTH ACTOR. It's rather a joke.

THIRD ACTOR. Well, we'll see what's going to happen next.

[*Thus talking, the ACTORS leave the stage, some going out by the little door at the back; others retiring to their dressing-rooms.*

The curtain remains up.

The action of the play is suspended for twenty minutes.]

ACT II

The stage call-bells ring to warn the company that the play is about to begin again.

THE STEPDAUGHTER comes out of the MANAGER's office along with the CHILD and the BOY. As she comes out of the office, she cries: Nonsense! Nonsense! Do it yourselves! I'm not going to mix myself up in this mess. [*Turning to the CHILD and coming quickly with her on to the stage.*] Come on, Rosetta, let's run!

[*The BOY follows them slowly, remaining a little behind and seeming perplexed.*]

THE STEPDAUGHTER [*stops, bends over the CHILD and takes the latter's face between her hands*]. My little darling! You're frightened, aren't you? You don't know where you are, do you? [*Pretending to reply to a question of the CHILD.*] What is the stage? It's a place, baby, you know, where people play at being serious, a place where they act comedies. We've got to act a comedy now, dead serious, you know; and you're in it also, little one. [*Embraces her, pressing the little head to her breast, and rocking the CHILD for a moment.*] Oh darling, darling, what a horrid comedy you've got to play! What a wretched part they've found for you! A garden . . . a fountain . . . look . . . just suppose, kiddie, it's here. Where, you say? Why, right here in the middle. It's all pretence you know. That's the trouble, my pet: it's all make-believe here. It's better to imagine it though, because if they fix it up for you, it'll only be painted cardboard, painted cardboard for the rockery, the water, the plants . . . Ah, but I think a baby like this one would sooner have a make-believe fountain than a real one, so she could play with it. What a joke it'll be for the others! But for you, alas! not quite such a joke: you who are real, baby dear, and really play by a real fountain that is big and green and beautiful, with ever so many bamboos

around it that are reflected in the water, and a whole lot of little ducks swimming about . . . No, Rosetta, no, your mother doesn't bother about you on account of that wretch of a son there. I'm in the devil of a temper, and as for that lad . . . [*Seizes BOY by the arm to force him to take one of his hands out of his pockets.*] What have you got there? What are you hiding? [*Pulls his hand out of his pocket, looks into it and catches the glint of a revolver.*] Ah, where did you get this? [*The BOY, very pale in the face, looks at her, but does not answer.*] Idiot! If I'd been in your place, instead of killing myself, I'd have shot one of those two, or both of them: father and son.

[*The FATHER enters from the office, all excited from his work. The MANAGER follows him.*]

THE FATHER. Come on, come on, dear! Come here for a minute! We've arranged everything. It's all fixed up.

THE MANAGER [*also excited*]. If you please, young lady, there are one or two points to settle still. Will you come along?

THE STEPDAUGHTER [*following him towards the office*]. Ouff! what's the good, if you've arranged everything.

[*The FATHER, MANAGER and STEPDAUGHTER go back into the office again (off) for a moment. At the same time, the SON, followed by the MOTHER, comes out.*]

THE SON [*looking at the three entering office*]. Oh this is fine, fine! And to think I can't even get away!

[*The MOTHER attempts to look at him, but lowers her eyes immediately when he turns away from her. She then sits down. The BOY and the CHILD approach her. She casts a glance again at the SON, and speaks with humble tones, trying to draw him into conversation.*]

THE MOTHER. And isn't my punishment the worst of all? [*Then seeing from the SON's manner that he will not bother himself about her.*] My God! Why are you so cruel? Isn't it enough for one person to support all this torment? Must you then insist on others seeing it also?

THE SON [*half to himself, meaning the MOTHER to hear, however*]. And they want to put it on the stage! If there was at least a reason for it! He thinks he has got at the meaning of it all. Just as if each one of us in every circumstance of life couldn't find his own explanation of it! [*Pauses.*] He complains he was discovered in a place where he ought not to have been seen, in a moment of his life which ought to have remained hidden and kept out of the reach of convention which he has to maintain for other people. And what about my case? Haven't I had to reveal what no son ought ever to reveal: how father and mother live and are man and wife for themselves quite apart from that idea of father and mother which we give them? When this idea is revealed, our life is then linked at one point only to that man and that woman; and as such it should shame them, shouldn't it?

[*The MOTHER hides her face in her hands. From the dressing-rooms and the little door at the back of the stage the ACTORS and STAGE MANAGER return, followed by the PROPERTY MAN, and the PROMPTER. At the same moment, the MANAGER comes out of his office, accompanied by the FATHER and the STEPDAUGHTER.*]

THE MANAGER. Come on, come on, ladies and gentlemen! Heh! you there, machinist!

MACHINIST. Yes sir?

THE MANAGER. Fix up the white parlor with the floral decorations. Two wings and a drop with a door will do. Hurry up!

[The MACHINIST runs off at once to prepare the scene, and arranges it while the MANAGER talks with the STAGE MANAGER, the PROPERTY MAN, and the PROMPTER on matters of detail.]

THE MANAGER [to PROPERTY MAN]. Just have a look, and see if there isn't a sofa or divan in the wardrobe . . .

PROPERTY MAN. There's the green one.

THE STEPDAUGHTER. No, no! Green won't do. It was yellow, ornamented with flowers—very large! and most comfortable!

PROPERTY MAN. There isn't one like that.

THE MANAGER. It doesn't matter. Use the one we've got.

THE STEPDAUGHTER. Doesn't matter? It's most important!

THE MANAGER. We're only trying it now. Please don't interfere. [To PROPERTY MAN.] See if we've got a shop window—long and narrowish.

THE STEPDAUGHTER. And the little table! The little mahogany table for the pale blue envelope!

PROPERTY MAN [to MANAGER]. There's that little gilt one.

THE MANAGER. That'll do fine.

THE FATHER. A mirror.

THE STEPDAUGHTER. And the screen! We must have a screen. Otherwise how can I manage?

PROPERTY MAN. That's all right, Miss. We've got any amount of them.

THE MANAGER [to the STEPDAUGHTER]. We want some clothes pegs too, don't we?

THE STEPDAUGHTER. Yes, several, several!

THE MANAGER. See how many we've got and bring them all.

PROPERTY MAN. All right!

[The PROPERTY MAN hurries off to obey his orders. While he is putting the things in their places, the MANAGER talks to the PROMPTER and then with the CHARACTERS and the ACTORS.]

THE MANAGER [to PROMPTER]. Take your seat. Look here: this is the outline of the scenes, act by act. [Hands him some sheets of paper.] And now I'm going to ask you to do something out of the ordinary.

PROMPTER. Take it down in shorthand?

THE MANAGER [pleasantly surprised]. Exactly! Can you do shorthand?

PROMPTER. Yes, a little.

MANAGER. Good! [Turning to a stage hand.] Go and get some paper from my office, plenty, as much as you can find.

[The STAGE HAND goes off, and soon returns with a handful of paper which he gives to the PROMPTER.]

THE MANAGER [to PROMPTER]. You follow the scenes as we play them, and try to get the points down, at any rate the most important ones. [Then addressing the ACTORS.] Clear the stage, ladies and gentlemen! Come over here [pointing to the Left] and listen attentively.

LEADING LADY. But, excuse me, we . . .

THE MANAGER [guessing her thought]. Don't worry! You won't have to improvise.

LEADING MAN. What have we to do then?

THE MANAGER. Nothing. For the moment you just watch and listen. Everybody will get his part written out afterwards. At present we're going to try the thing as best we can. They're going to act now.

THE FATHER [*as if fallen from the clouds into the confusion of the stage*]. We? What do you mean, if you please, by a rehearsal?

THE MANAGER. A rehearsal for them. [*Points to the ACTORS.*]

THE FATHER. But since we are the characters . . .

THE MANAGER. All right: "characters" then, if you insist on calling yourselves such. But here, my dear sir, the characters don't act. Here the actors do the acting. The characters are there, in the "book"—[*pointing towards PROMPTER'S box*] when there is a "book"!

THE FATHER. I won't contradict you; but excuse me, the actors aren't the characters. They want to be, they pretend to be, don't they? Now if these gentlemen here are fortunate enough to have us alive before them . . .

THE MANAGER. Oh this is grand! You want to come before the public yourselves then?

THE FATHER. As we are . . .

THE MANAGER. I can assure you it would be a magnificent spectacle!

LEADING MAN. What's the use of us here anyway then?

THE MANAGER. You're not going to pretend that you can act? It makes me laugh! [*The ACTORS laugh.*] There, you see, they are laughing at the notion. But, by the way, I must cast the parts. That won't be difficult. They cast themselves. [*To the SECOND LADY LEAD.*] You play the Mother. [*To the FATHER.*] We must find her a name.

THE FATHER. Amalia, sir.

THE MANAGER. But that is the real name of your wife. We don't want to call her by her real name.

THE FATHER. Why ever not, if it is her name? . . . Still, perhaps, if that lady must . . . [*makes a slight motion of the hand to indicate the SECOND LADY LEAD*]. I see this woman here [*means the MOTHER*] as 'Amalia. But do as you like. [*Gets more and more confused.*] I don't know what to say to you. Already, I begin to hear my own words ring false, as if they had another sound . . .

THE MANAGER. Don't you worry about it. It'll be our job to find the right tones. And as for her name, if you want her Amalia, Amalia it shall be; and if you don't like it, we'll find another! For the moment though, we'll call the characters in this way: [*to the JUVENILE LEAD*] You are the Son; [*to the LEADING LADY*] You naturally are the Stepdaughter . . .

THE STEPDAUGHTER [*excitedly*]. What? what? I, that woman there? [*Bursts out laughing.*]

THE MANAGER [*angry*]. What is there to laugh at?

LEADING LADY [*indignant*]. Nobody has ever dared to laugh at me. I insist on being treated with respect; otherwise I go away.

THE STEPDAUGHTER. No, no, excuse me . . . I am not laughing at you . . .

THE MANAGER [*to STEPDAUGHTER*]. You ought to feel honored to be played by . . .

LEADING LADY [*at once, contemptuously*]. "That woman there" . . .

THE STEPDAUGHTER. But I wasn't speaking of you, you know. I was

speaking of myself—whom I can't see at all in you! That is all. I don't know . . . but . . . you . . . aren't in the least like me . . .

THE FATHER. True. Here's the point. Look here, sir, our temperaments, our souls . . .

THE MANAGER. Temperament, soul, be hanged. Do you suppose the spirit of the piece is in you? Nothing of the kind!

THE FATHER. What, haven't we our own temperaments, our own souls?

THE MANAGER. Not at all. Your soul or whatever you like to call it takes shape here. The actors give body and form to it, voice and gesture. And my actors—I may tell you—have given expression to much more lofty material than this little drama of yours, which may or may not hold up on the stage. But if it does, the merit of it, believe me, will be due to my actors.

THE FATHER. I don't dare contradict you, sir; but, believe me, it is a terrible suffering for us who are as we are, with these bodies of ours, these features to see . . .

THE MANAGER [*cutting him short and out of patience*]. Good heavens! The make-up will remedy all that, man, the make-up . . .

THE FATHER. Maybe. But the voice, the gestures . . .

THE MANAGER. Now, look here! On the stage, you as yourself, cannot exist. The actor here acts you, and that's an end to it!

THE FATHER. I understand. And now I think I see why our author who conceived us as we are, all alive, didn't want to put us on the stage after all. I haven't the least desire to offend your actors. Far from it! But when I think that I am to be acted by . . . I don't know by whom . . .

LEADING MAN [*on his dignity*]. By me, if you've no objection!

THE FATHER [*humbly, mellifluously*]. Honored, I assure you, sir. [*Bows.*] Still, I must say that try as this gentleman may, with all his good will and wonderful art, to absorb me into himself . . .

LEADING MAN. Oh chuck it! "Wonderful art!" Withdraw that, please!

THE FATHER. The performance he will give, even doing his best with make-up to look like me . . .

LEADING MAN. It will certainly be a bit difficult! [*The ACTORS laugh.*]

THE FATHER. Exactly! It will be difficult to act me as I really am. The effect will be rather—apart from the make-up—according as to how he supposes I am, as he senses me—if he does sense me—and not as I inside of myself feel myself to be. It seems to me then that account should be taken of this by everyone whose duty it may become to criticize us . . .

THE MANAGER. Heavens! The man's starting to think about the critics now! Let them say what they like. It's up to us to put on the play if we can. [*Looking around.*] Come on! come on! Is the stage set? [*To the ACTORS and CHARACTERS.*] Stand back—stand back! Let me see, and don't let's lose any more time! [*To the STEPDAUGHTER.*] Is it all right as it is now?

THE STEPDAUGHTER. Well, to tell the truth, I don't recognize the scene.

THE MANAGER. My dear lady, you can't possibly suppose that we can construct that shop of Madame Pace piece by piece here? [*To the FATHER.*] You said a white room with flowered wall paper, didn't you?

THE FATHER. Yes.

THE MANAGER. Well then. We've got the furniture right more or less. Bring that little table a bit further forward. [*The stage hands obey the order. To*

PROPERTY MAN.] You go and find an envelope, if possible, a pale blue one; and give it to that gentleman. [*Indicates the FATHER.*]

PROPERTY MAN. An ordinary envelope?

MANAGER AND FATHER. Yes, yes, an ordinary envelope.

PROPERTY MAN. At once, sir. [*Exit.*]

THE MANAGER. Ready, everyone! First scene—the Young Lady. [*The LEADING LADY comes forward.*] No, no, you must wait. I meant her. [*Indicating the STEPDAUGHTER*] You just watch—

THE STEPDAUGHTER [*adding at once*]. How I shall play it, how I shall live it! . . .

LEADING LADY [*offended*]. I shall live it also, you may be sure, as soon as I begin!

THE MANAGER [*with his hands to his head*]. Ladies and gentlemen, if you please! No more useless discussions! Scene I: the young lady with Madame Pace: Oh! [*Looks around as if lost.*] And this Madame Pace, where is she?

THE FATHER. She isn't with us, sir.

THE MANAGER. Then what the devil's to be done?

THE FATHER. But she is alive too.

THE MANAGER. Yes, but where is she?

THE FATHER. One minute. Let me speak! [*Turning to the ACTRESSES.*] If these ladies would be so good as to give me their hats for a moment . . .

THE ACTRESSES [*half-surprised, half-laughing, in chorus*]. What? Why?

Our hats?

What does he say?

THE MANAGER. What are you going to do with the ladies' hats? [*The ACTORS laugh.*]

THE FATHER. Oh nothing. I just want to put them on these pegs for a moment. And one of the ladies will be so kind as to take off her mantle . . .

THE ACTORS. Oh, what d'you think of that? Only the mantle?

He must be mad.

SOME ACTRESSES. But why?

Mantles as well?

THE FATHER. To hang them up here for a moment. Please be so kind, will you?

THE ACTRESSES [*taking off their hats, one or two also their cloaks, and going to hang them on the racks*]. After all, why not? There you are!

This is really funny.

We've got to put them on show.

THE FATHER. Exactly; just like that, on show.

THE MANAGER. May we know why?

THE FATHER. I'll tell you. Who knows if, by arranging the stage for her, she does not come here herself, attracted by the very articles of her trade? [*Inviting the ACTORS to look towards the exit at back of stage.*] Look! Look!

[*The door at the back of stage opens and MADAME PACE enters and takes a few steps forward. She is a fat, oldish woman with puffy oxygenated hair. She is rouged and powdered, dressed with a comical elegance in black silk. Round*

her waist is a long silver chain from which hangs a pair of scissors. The STEP-DAUGHTER runs over to her at once amid the stupor of the ACTORS.]

THE STEPDAUGHTER [turning towards her]. There she is! There she is!

THE FATHER [radiant]. It's she! I said so, didn't I? There she is!

THE MANAGER [conquering his surprise, and then becoming indignant]. What sort of a trick is this?

LEADING MAN [almost at the same time]. What's going to happen next? JUVENILE LEAD. Where does she come from?

L'INGÉNUÉ. They've been holding her in reserve, I guess.

LEADING LADY. A vulgar trick!

THE FATHER [dominating the protests]. Excuse me, all of you! Why are you so anxious to destroy in the name of a vulgar, commonplace sense of truth, this reality which comes to birth attracted and formed by the magic of the stage itself, which has indeed more right to live here than you, since it is much truer than you—if you don't mind my saying so? Which is the actress among you who is to play Madame Pace? Well, here is Madame Pace herself. And you will allow, I fancy, that the actress who acts her will be less true than this woman here, who is herself in person. You see my daughter recognized her and went over to her at once. Now you're going to witness the scene.

[But the scene between the STEPDAUGHTER and MADAME PACE has already begun despite the protest of the ACTORS and the reply of the FATHER. It has begun quietly, naturally, in a manner impossible for the stage. So when the ACTORS, called to attention by the FATHER, turn round and see MADAME PACE, who has placed one hand under the STEPDAUGHTER's chin to raise her head, they observe her at first with great attention, but hearing her speak in an unintelligible manner their interest begins to wane.]

THE MANAGER. Well? well?

LEADING MAN. What does she say?

LEADING LADY. One can't hear a word.

JUVENILE LEAD. Louder! Louder please!

THE STEPDAUGHTER [leaving MADAME PACE, who smiles a Sphinx-like smile, and advancing towards the ACTORS]. Louder? Louder? What are you talking about? These aren't matters which can be shouted at the top of one's voice. If I have spoken them out loud, it was to shame him and have my revenge. [Indicates the FATHER.] But for Madame it's quite a different matter.

THE MANAGER. Indeed? indeed? But here, you know, people have got to make themselves heard, my dear. Even we who are on the stage can't hear you. What will it be when the public's in the theater? And anyway, you can very well speak up now among yourselves, since we shan't be present to listen to you as we are now. You've got to pretend to be alone in a room at the back of a shop where no one can hear you.

[The STEPDAUGHTER coquettishly and with a touch of malice makes a sign of disagreement two or three times with her finger.]

THE MANAGER. What do you mean by no?

THE STEPDAUGHTER [sotto voce, mysteriously]. There's someone who will hear us if she [indicating MADAME PACE] speaks out loud.

THE MANAGER [in consternation]. What? Have you got someone else to spring on us now? [The ACTORS burst out laughing.]

THE FATHER. No, no sir. She is alluding to me. I've got to be here—there

behind that door, in waiting; and Madame Pace knows it. In fact, if you will allow me, I'll go there at once, so I can be quite ready. [*Moves away.*]

THE MANAGER [*stopping him*]. No! wait! wait! We must observe the conventions of the theater. Before you are ready . . .

THE STEPDAUGHTER [*interrupting him*]. No, get on with it at once! I'm just dying, I tell you, to act this scene. If he's ready, I'm more than ready.

THE MANAGER [*shouting*]. But, my dear young lady, first of all, we must have the scene between you and this lady . . . [*Indicates MADAME PACE.*] Do you understand? . . .

THE STEPDAUGHTER. Good Heavens! She's been telling me what you know already: that mamma's work is badly done again, that the material's ruined; and that if I want her to continue to help us in our misery I must be patient . . .

MADAME PACE [*coming forward with an air of great importance*]. Yes indeed, sir, I no wanta take advantage of her, I no wanta be hard . . .

[*Note: MADAME PACE is supposed to talk in a jargon half Italian, half English.*]

THE MANAGER [*alarmed*]. What? What? she talks like that? [*The ACTORS burst out laughing again.*]

THE STEPDAUGHTER [*also laughing*]. Yes, yes, that's the way she talks, half English, half Italian! Most comical it is!

MADAME PACE. Itta seem not verra polite gentlemen laugha attà me eef I trya best speaka English.

THE MANAGER. *Diamine!*³ Of course! Of course! Let her talk like that! Just what we want. Talk just like that, Madame, if you please! The effect will be certain. Exactly what was wanted to put a little comic relief into the crudity of the situation. Of course she talks like that! Magnificent!

THE STEPDAUGHTER. Magnificent? Certainly! When certain suggestions are made to one in language of that kind, the effect is certain, since it seems almost a joke. One feels inclined to laugh when one hears her talk about an "old signore" "who wanta talka nicely with you." Nice old signore, eh, Madame?

MADAME PACE. Not so old, my dear, not so old! And even if you no lika him, he won't make any scandal!

THE MOTHER [*jumping up amid the amazement and consternation of the ACTORS, who had not been noticing her. They move to restrain her*]. You old devil! You murderess!

THE STEPDAUGHTER [*running over to calm her MOTHER*]. Calm yourself, mother, calm yourself! Please don't . . .

THE FATHER [*going to her also at the same time*]. Calm yourself! Don't get excited! Sit down now!

THE MOTHER. Well then, take that woman away out of my sight!

THE STEPDAUGHTER [*to the MANAGER*]. It is impossible for my mother to remain here.

THE FATHER [*to the MANAGER*]. They can't be here together. And for this reason, you see: that woman there was not with us when we came . . . If they are on together, the whole thing is given away inevitably, as you see.

THE MANAGER. It doesn't matter. This is only a first rough sketch—just to get an idea of the various points of the scene, even confusedly . . . [*Turning*

³ (Italian) The deuce!

to the MOTHER and leading her to her chair.] Come along, my dear lady, sit down now, and let's get on with the scene . . .

[Meanwhile, the STEPDAUGHTER, coming forward again, turns to MADAME PACE.]

THE STEPDAUGHTER. Come on, Madame, come on!

MADAME PACE [offended]. No, no, grazie.⁴ I not do anything witha your mother present.

THE STEPDAUGHTER. Nonsense! Introduce this "old signore" who wants to talk nicely to me. [Addressing the company imperiously.] We've got to do this scene one way or another, haven't we? Come on! [To MADAME PACE.] You can go!

MADAME PACE. Ah yes! I go'way! I go'way! Certainly! [Exit furious.]

THE STEPDAUGHTER [to the FATHER]. Now you make your entry. No, you needn't go over here. Come here. Let's suppose you've already come in. Like that, yes! I'm here with bowed head, modest like. Come on! Out with your voice! Say "Good morning, Miss" in that peculiar tone, that special tone . . .

THE MANAGER. Excuse me, but are you the Manager, or am I? [To the FATHER, who looks undecided and perplexed.] Get on with it, man! Go down there to the back of the stage. You needn't go off. Then come right forward here.

[The FATHER does as he is told, looking troubled and perplexed at first. But as soon as he begins to move, the reality of the action affects him, and he begins to smile and to be more natural. The ACTORS watch intently.]

THE MANAGER [sotto voce, quickly to the PROMPTER in his box]. Ready! ready? Get ready to write now.

THE FATHER [coming forward and speaking in a different tone]. Good afternoon, Miss!

THE STEPDAUGHTER [head bowed down slightly, with restrained disgust]. Good afternoon!

THE FATHER [looks under her hat which partly covers her face. Perceiving she is very young, he makes an exclamation, partly of surprise, partly of fear lest he compromise himself in a risky adventure.] Ah . . . but . . . ah . . . I say . . . this is not the first time that you have come here, is it?

THE STEPDAUGHTER [modestly]. No sir.

THE FATHER. You've been here before, eh? [Then seeing her nod agreement.] More than once? [Waits for her to answer, looks under her hat, smiles, and then says.] Well then, there's no need to be so shy, is there? May I take off your hat?

THE STEPDAUGHTER [anticipating him and with veiled disgust]. No sir . . . I'll do it myself. [Takes it off quickly.]

[The MOTHER, who watches the progress of the scene with the SON and the other two CHILDREN, who cling to her, is on thorns; and follows with varying expressions of sorrow, indignation, anxiety, and horror the words and actions of the other two. From time to time she hides her face in her hands and sobs.]

THE MOTHER. Oh, my God, my God!

THE FATHER [playing his part with a touch of gallantry]. Give it to me! I'll put it down. [Takes hat from her hands.] But a dear little head like yours

⁴ (Italian) Thank you (with the implication, as frequently in English, that what is offered is not really desirable).

ought to have a smarter hat. Come and help me choose one from the stock, won't you?

L'INGÉNUË [*interrupting*]. I say . . . those are our hats you know.

THE MANAGER [*furious*]. Silence! silence! Don't try and be funny, if you please . . . We're playing the scene now I'd have you notice. [*To the STEPDAUGHTER.*] Begin again, please!

THE STEPDAUGHTER [*continuing*]. No thank you, sir.

THE FATHER. Oh, come now. Don't talk like that. You must take it. I shall be upset if you don't. There are some lovely little hats here; and then—Madame will be pleased. She expects it, anyway, you know.

THE STEPDAUGHTER. No, no! I couldn't wear it!

THE FATHER. Oh, you're thinking about what they'd say at home if they saw you come in with a new hat? My dear girl, there's always a way round these little matters, you know.

THE STEPDAUGHTER [*all keyed up*]. No, it's not that. I couldn't wear it because I am . . . as you see . . . you might have noticed . . . [*Showing her black dress.*]

THE FATHER. . . . in mourning! Of course: I beg your pardon: I'm frightfully sorry . . .

THE STEPDAUGHTER [*forcing herself to conquer her indignation and nausea*]. Stop! Stop! It's I who must thank you. There's no need for you to feel mortified or specially sorry. Don't think any more of what I've said. [*Tries to smile.*] I must forget that I am dressed so . . .

THE MANAGER [*interrupting and turning to the PROMPTER*]. Stop a minute! Stop! Don't write that down. Cut out that last bit. [*Then to the FATHER and the STEPDAUGHTER.*] Fine! It's going fine! [*To the FATHER only.*] And now you can go on as we arranged. [*To the ACTORS.*] Pretty good that scene, where he offers her the hat, eh?

THE STEPDAUGHTER. The best's coming now. Why can't we go on?

THE MANAGER. Have a little patience! [*To the ACTORS.*] Of course, it must be treated rather lightly.

LEADING MAN. Still, with a bit of go in it!

LEADING LADY. Of course! It's easy enough! [*To the LEADING MAN.*] Shall you and I try it now?

LEADING MAN. Why, yes! I'll prepare my entrance. [*Exit in order to make his entrance.*]

THE MANAGER [*to the LEADING LADY*]. See here! The scene between you and Madame Pace is finished. I'll have it written out properly after. You remain here . . . oh, where are you going?

LEADING LADY. One minute. I want to put my hat on again. [*Goes over to hat-rack and puts her hat on her head.*]

THE MANAGER. Good! You stay here with your head bowed down a bit.

THE STEPDAUGHTER. But she isn't dressed in black.

LEADING LADY. But I shall be, and much more effectively than you.

THE MANAGER [*to STEPDAUGHTER*]. Be quiet please, and watch! You'll be able to learn something. [*Clapping his hands.*] Come on! come on! Entrance, please!

[*The door at rear of stage opens, and the LEADING MAN enters with the lively manner of an old gallant. The rendering of the scene by the ACTORS*

from the very first words is seen to be quite a different thing, though it has not in any way the air of a parody. Naturally, the STEPDAUGHTER and the FATHER, not being able to recognize themselves in the LEADING LADY and the LEADING MAN, who deliver their words in different tones and with a different psychology, express, sometimes with smiles, sometimes with gestures, the impression they receive.]

LEADING MAN. Good afternoon, Miss . . .

THE FATHER [*at once unable to contain himself*]. No! no!

[*The STEPDAUGHTER noticing the way the LEADING MAN enters, bursts out laughing.*]

THE MANAGER [*furious*]. Silence! And you please just stop that laughing. If we go on like this, we shall never finish.

THE STEPDAUGHTER. Forgive me, sir, but it's natural enough. This lady [*indicating LEADING LADY*] stands there still; but if she is supposed to be me, I can assure you that if I heard anyone say "Good afternoon" in that manner and in that tone, I should burst out laughing as I did.

THE FATHER. Yes, yes, the manner, the tone . . .

THE MANAGER. Nonsense! Rubbish! Stand aside and let me see the action.

LEADING MAN. If I've got to represent an old fellow who's coming into a house of an equivocal character . . .

THE MANAGER. Don't listen to them, for Heaven's sake! Do it again! It goes fine. [*Waiting for the ACTORS to begin again.*] Well?

LEADING MAN. Good afternoon, Miss.

LEADING LADY. Good afternoon.

LEADING MAN [*imitating the gesture of the FATHER when he looked under the hat, and then expressing quite clearly first satisfaction and then fear*]. Ah, but . . . I say . . . this is not the first time that you have come here, is it?

THE MANAGER. Good, but not quite so heavily. Like this. [*Acts himself.*] "This isn't the first time that you have come here" . . . [*To the LEADING LADY.*] And you say: "No, sir."

LEADING LADY. No, sir.

LEADING MAN. You've been here before, more than once.

THE MANAGER. No, no, stop! Let her nod "yes" first. "You've been here before, eh?" [*The LEADING LADY lifts up her head slightly and closes her eyes as though in disgust. Then she inclines her head twice.*]

THE STEPDAUGHTER [*unable to contain herself*]. Oh my God! [*Puts a hand to her mouth to prevent herself from laughing.*]

THE MANAGER [*turning round*]. What's the matter?

THE STEPDAUGHTER. Nothing, nothing!

THE MANAGER [*to LEADING MAN*]. Go on!

LEADING MAN. You've been here before, eh? Well then, there's no need to be so shy, is there? May I take off your hat?

[*The LEADING MAN says this last speech in such a tone and with such gestures that the STEPDAUGHTER, though she has her hand to her mouth, cannot keep from laughing.*]

LEADING LADY [*indignant*]. I'm not going to stop here to be made a fool of by that woman there.

LEADING MAN. Neither am I! I'm through with it!

THE MANAGER [*shouting to STEPDAUGHTER*]. Silence! for once and all, I tell you!

THE STEPDAUGHTER. Forgive me! forgive me!

THE MANAGER. You haven't any manners: that's what it is! You go too far.

THE FATHER [*endeavoring to intervene*]. Yes, it's true, but excuse her . . .

THE MANAGER. Excuse what? It's absolutely disgusting.

THE FATHER. Yes, sir, but believe me, it has such a strange effect when . . .

THE MANAGER. Strange? Why strange? Where is it strange?

THE FATHER. No, sir; I admire your actors—this gentleman here, this lady; but they are certainly not us!

THE MANAGER. I should hope not. Evidently they cannot be you, if they are actors.

THE FATHER. Just so: actors! Both of them act our parts exceedingly well. But, believe me, it produces quite a different effect on us. They want to be us, but they aren't, all the same.

THE MANAGER. What is it then anyway?

THE FATHER. Something that is . . . that is theirs—and no longer ours . . .

THE MANAGER. But naturally, inevitably. I've told you so already.

THE FATHER. Yes, I understand . . . I understand . . .

THE MANAGER. Well then, let's have no more of it! [*Turning to the ACTORS.*] We'll have the rehearsals by ourselves, afterwards, in the ordinary way. I never could stand rehearsing with the author present. He's never satisfied! [*Turning to the FATHER and STEPDAUGHTER.*] Come on! Let's get on with it again; and try and see if you can't keep from laughing.

THE STEPDAUGHTER. Oh, I shan't laugh any more. There's a nice little bit coming for me now: you'll see.

THE MANAGER. Well then: when she says "Don't think any more of what I've said. I must forget, etc.," you [*addressing the FATHER*] come in sharp with "I understand, I understand"; and then you ask her . . .

THE STEPDAUGHTER [*interrupting*]. What?

THE MANAGER. Why she is in mourning.

THE STEPDAUGHTER. Not at all! See here: when I told him that it was useless for me to be thinking about my wearing mourning, do you know how he answered me? "Ah well," he said, "then let's take off this little frock."

THE MANAGER. Great! Just what we want, to make a riot in the theater!

THE STEPDAUGHTER. But it's the truth!

THE MANAGER. What does that matter? Acting is our business here. Truth up to a certain point, but no further.

THE STEPDAUGHTER. What do you want to do then?

THE MANAGER. You'll see, you'll see! Leave it to me.

THE STEPDAUGHTER. No sir! What you want to do is to piece together a little romantic sentimental scene out of my disgust, out of all the reasons, each more cruel and viler than the other, why I am what I am. He is to ask me why I'm in mourning; and I'm to answer with tears in my eyes, that it is just two months since papa died. No sir, no! He's got to say to me; as he did say: "Well, let's take off this little dress at once." And I; with my two months' mourning in

my heart, went there behind that screen, and with these fingers tingling with shame . . .

THE MANAGER [*running his hands through his hair*]. For Heaven's sake! What are you saying?

THE STEPDAUGHTER [*crying out excitedly*]. The truth! The truth!

THE MANAGER. It may be. I don't deny it, and I can understand all your horror; but you must surely see that you can't have this kind of thing on the stage. It won't go.

THE STEPDAUGHTER. Not possible, eh? Very well! I'm much obliged to you—but I'm off!

THE MANAGER. Now be reasonable! Don't lose your temper!

THE STEPDAUGHTER. I won't stop here! I won't! I can see you've fixed it all up with him in your office. All this talk about what is possible for the stage . . . I understand! He wants to get at his complicated "cerebral drama," to have his famous remorse and torments acted; but I want to act my part, *my part*!

THE MANAGER [*annoyed, shaking his shoulders*]. Ah! Just *your* part! But, if you will pardon me, there are other parts than yours: his [*indicating the FATHER*] and hers! [*Indicating the MOTHER.*] On the stage you can't have a character becoming too prominent and overshadowing all the others. The thing is to pack them all into a neat little framework and then act what is actable. I am aware of the fact that everyone has his own interior life which he wants very much to put forward. But the difficulty lies in this fact: to set out just so much as is necessary for the stage, taking the other characters into consideration, and at the same time hint at the unrevealed interior life of each. I am willing to admit, my dear young lady, that from your point of view it would be a fine idea if each character could tell the public all his troubles in a nice monologue or a regular one-hour lecture. [*Good-humoredly.*] You must restrain yourself, my dear, and in your own interest, too; because this fury of yours, this exaggerated disgust you show, may make a bad impression, you know. After you have confessed to me that there were others before him at Madame Pace's and more than once . . .

THE STEPDAUGHTER [*bowing her head, impressed*]. It's true. But remember those others mean him for me all the same.

THE MANAGER [*not understanding*]. What? The others? What do you mean?

THE STEPDAUGHTER. For one who has gone wrong, sir, he who was responsible for the first fault is responsible for all that follow. He is responsible for my faults, was, even before I was born. Look at him, and see if it isn't true!

THE MANAGER. Well, well! And does the weight of so much responsibility seem nothing to you? Give him a chance to act it, to get it over!

THE STEPDAUGHTER. How? How can he act all his "noble remorse" all his "moral torments," if you want to spare him the horror of being discovered one day—after he had asked her what he did ask her—in the arms of her, that already fallen woman, that child, sir, that child he used to watch come out of school? [*She is moved.*]

[*The MOTHER at this point is overcome with emotion, and breaks out into a fit of crying. All are touched. A long pause.*]

THE STEPDAUGHTER [*as soon as the MOTHER becomes a little quieter, adds resolutely and gravely*]. At present, we are unknown to the public. Tomorrow,

you will act us as you wish, treating us in your own manner. But do you really want to see drama, do you want to see it flash out as it really did?

THE MANAGER. Of course! That's just what I do want, so I can use as much of it as is possible.

THE STEPDAUGHTER. Well then, ask that Mother there to leave us.

THE MOTHER [*changing her low plaint into a sharp cry*]. No! No! Don't permit it, sir, don't permit it!

THE MANAGER. But it's only to try it.

THE MOTHER. I can't bear it. I can't.

THE MANAGER. But since it has happened already . . . I don't understand!

THE MOTHER. It's taking place now. It happens all the time. My torment isn't a pretended one. I live and feel every minute of my torture. Those two children there—have you heard them speak? They can't speak any more. They cling to me to keep my torment actual and vivid for me. But for themselves, they do not exist, they aren't any more. And she [*indicating STEPDAUGHTER*] has run away, she has left me, and is lost. If I now see her here before me, it is only to renew for me the tortures I have suffered for her too.

THE FATHER. The eternal moment! She [*indicating the STEPDAUGHTER*] is here to catch me, fix me, and hold me eternally in the stocks for that one fleeting and shameful moment of my life. She can't give it up! And you, sir, cannot either fairly spare me it.

THE MANAGER. I never said I didn't want to act it. It will form, as a matter of fact, the nucleus of the whole first act right up to her surprise. [*Indicating the MOTHER.*]

THE FATHER. Just so! This is my punishment: the passion in all of us that must culminate in her final cry.

THE STEPDAUGHTER. I can hear it still in my ears. It's driven me mad, that cry!—You can put me on as you like; it doesn't matter. Fully dressed, if you like—provided I have at least the arm bare; because, standing like this [*she goes close to the FATHER and leans her head on his breast*] with my head so, and my arms round his neck, I saw a vein pulsing in my arm here; and then, as if that live vein had awakened disgust in me, I closed my eyes like this, and let my head sink on his breast. [*Turning to the MOTHER.*] Cry out, mother! Cry out! [*Buries head in the FATHER's breast, and with her shoulders raised as if to prevent her hearing the cry, adds in tones of intense emotion.*] Cry out as you did then!

THE MOTHER [*coming forward to separate them*]. No! My daughter, my daughter! [*And after having pulled her away from him.*] You brute! you brute! She is my daughter! Don't you see she's my daughter?

THE MANAGER [*walking backwards towards footlights*]. Fine! fine! Damned good! And then, of course—curtain!

THE FATHER [*going towards him excitedly*]. Yes, of course, because that's the way it really happened.

THE MANAGER [*convinced and pleased*]. Oh, yes, no doubt about it. Curtain here, curtain!

[*At the reiterated cry of the MANAGER, the MACHINIST lets the curtain down, leaving the MANAGER and the FATHER in front of it before the footlights.*]

THE MANAGER. The darned idiot! I said "curtain" to show the act should end there, and he goes and lets it down in earnest. [*To the FATHER, while he*

pulls the curtain back to go on to the stage again.] Yes, yes, it's all right. Effect certain! That's the right ending. I'll guarantee the first act at any rate.

ACT III

When the curtain goes up again, it is seen that the stage hands have shifted the bit of scenery used in the last part, and have rigged up instead at the back of the stage a drop, with some trees, and one or two wings. A portion of a fountain basin is visible. The MOTHER is sitting on the Right with the two children by her side. The SON is on the same side, but away from the others. He seems bored, angry, and full of shame. The FATHER and the STEPDAUGHTER are also seated towards the Right front. On the other side (Left) are the ACTORS, much in the positions they occupied before the curtain was lowered. Only the MANAGER is standing up in the middle of the stage, with his hand closed over his mouth in the act of meditating.

THE MANAGER [*shaking his shoulders after a brief pause*]. Ah yes: the second act! Leave it to me, leave it all to me as we arranged, and you'll see! It'll go fine!

THE STEPDAUGHTER. Our entry into his house [*indicates the FATHER*] in spite of him . . . [*indicates the SON*].

THE MANAGER [*out of patience*]. Leave it to me. I tell you!

THE STEPDAUGHTER. Do let it be clear, at any rate, that it is in spite of my wishes.

THE MOTHER [*from her corner, shaking her head*]. For all the good that's come of it . . .

THE STEPDAUGHTER [*turning towards her quickly*]. It doesn't matter. The more harm done us, the more remorse for him.

THE MANAGER [*impatiently*]. I understand! Good Heavens! I understand! I'm taking it into account.

THE MOTHER [*supplicatingly*]. I beg you, sir, to let it appear quite plain that for conscience' sake I did try in every way . . .

THE STEPDAUGHTER [*interrupting indignantly and continuing for the MOTHER*]. . . . to pacify me, to dissuade me from spiting him. [*To MANAGER.*] Do as she wants: satisfy her, because it is true! I enjoy it immensely. Anyhow, as you can see, the meeker she is, the more she tries to get at his heart, the more distant and aloof does he become.

THE MANAGER. Are we going to begin this second act or not?

THE STEPDAUGHTER. I'm not going to talk any more now. But I must tell you this: you can't have the whole action take place in the garden, as you suggest. It isn't possible!

THE MANAGER. Why not?

THE STEPDAUGHTER. Because he [*indicates the SON again*] is always shut up alone in his room. And then there's all the part of that poor dazed-looking boy there which takes place indoors.

THE MANAGER. Maybe! On the other hand, you will understand—we can't change scenes three or four times in one act.

THE LEADING MAN. They used to once.

THE MANAGER. Yes, when the public was up to the level of that child there.

THE LEADING LADY. It makes the illusion easier.

THE FATHER [*irritated*]. The illusion! For Heaven's sake, don't say illusion. Please don't use that word, which is particularly painful for us.

THE MANAGER [*astounded*]. And why, if you please?

THE FATHER. It's painful, cruel, really cruel; and you ought to understand that.

THE MANAGER. But why? What ought we to say then? The illusion, I tell you sir, which we've got to create for the audience . . .

THE LEADING MAN. With our acting.

THE MANAGER. The illusion of a reality.

THE FATHER. I understand; but you, perhaps, do not understand us. Forgive me! You see . . . here for you and your actors, the thing is only—and rightly so . . . a kind of game . . .

THE LEADING LADY [*interrupting indignantly*]. A game! We're not children here, if you please! We are serious actors.

THE FATHER. I don't deny it. What I mean is the game, or play, of your art, which has to give, as the gentleman says, a perfect illusion of reality.

THE MANAGER. Precisely——!

THE FATHER. Now, if you consider the fact that we [*indicates himself and the other five CHARACTERS*], as we are, have no other reality outside of this illusion . . .

THE MANAGER [*astonished, looking at his ACTORS, who are also amazed*]. And what does that mean?

THE FATHER [*after watching them for a moment with a wan smile*]. As I say, sir, that which is a game of art for you is our sole reality. [*Brief pause. He goes a step or two nearer the MANAGER and adds*] But not only for us, you know, by the way. Just you think it over well. [*Looks him in the eyes.*] Can you tell me who you are?

THE MANAGER [*perplexed, half smiling*]. What? Who am I? I am myself.

THE FATHER. And if I were to tell you that that isn't true, because you are I? . . .

THE MANAGER. I should say you were mad——! [*The ACTORS laugh.*]

THE FATHER. You're quite right to laugh: because we are all making believe here. [*To the MANAGER.*] And you can therefore object that it's only for a joke that that gentleman there [*indicates the LEADING MAN*], who naturally is himself, has to be me, who am on the contrary myself—this thing you see here. You see I've caught you in a trap! [*The ACTORS laugh.*]

THE MANAGER [*annoyed*]. But we've had all this over once before. Do you want to begin again?

THE FATHER. No, no! that wasn't my meaning! In fact, I should like to request you to abandon this game of art [*looking at the LEADING LADY as if anticipating her*] which you are accustomed to play here with your actors, and to ask you seriously once again: who are you?

THE MANAGER [*astonished and irritated, turning to his ACTORS*]. If this fellow here hasn't got a nerve! A man who calls himself a character comes and asks me who I am!

THE FATHER [*with dignity, but not offended*]. A character, sir, may always ask a man who he is. Because a character has really a life of his own, marked with his especial characteristics; for which reason he is always "somebody." But a man—I'm not speaking of you now—may very well be "nobody."

THE MANAGER. Yes, but you are asking these questions of me, the boss, the manager! Do you understand?

THE FATHER. But only in order to know if you, as you really are now, see yourself as you once were with all the illusions that were yours then, with all the things both inside and outside of you as they seemed to you—as they were then indeed for you. Well, sir, if you think of all those illusions that mean nothing to you now, of all those things which don't even *seem* to you to exist any more, while once they *were* for you, don't you feel that—I won't say these boards—but the very earth under your feet is sinking away from you when you reflect that in the same way this *you* as you feel it today—all this present reality of yours—is fated to seem a mere illusion to you tomorrow?

THE MANAGER [*without having understood much, but astonished by the specious argument*]. Well, well! And where does all this take us anyway?

THE FATHER. Oh, nowhere! It's only to show you that if we [*indicating the CHARACTERS*] have no other reality beyond illusion, you too must not count overmuch on your reality as you feel it today, since, like that of yesterday, it may prove an illusion for you tomorrow.

THE MANAGER [*determining to make fun of him*]. Ah, excellent! Then you'll be saying next that you, with this comedy of yours that you brought here to act, are truer and more real than I am.

THE FATHER [*with the greatest seriousness*]. But of course; without doubt!

THE MANAGER. Ah, really?

THE FATHER. Why, I thought you'd understand that from the beginning.

THE MANAGER. More real than I?

THE FATHER. If your reality can change from one day to another . . .

THE MANAGER. But everyone knows it can change. It is always changing, the same as anyone else's.

THE FATHER [*with a cry*]. No, sir, not ours! Look here! That is the very difference! Our reality doesn't change: it can't change! It can't be other than what it is, because it is already fixed for ever. It's terrible. Ours is an immutable reality which should make you shudder when you approach us if you are really conscious of the fact that your reality is a mere transitory and fleeting illusion, taking this form today and that tomorrow, according to the conditions, according to your will, your sentiments, which in turn are controlled by an intellect that shows them to you today in one manner and tomorrow . . . who knows how? . . . Illusions of reality represented in this fatuous comedy of life that never ends, nor can ever end! Because if tomorrow it were to end . . . then why, all would be finished.

THE MANAGER. Oh for God's sake, will you *at least* finish with this philosophizing and let us try and shape this comedy which you yourself have brought me here? You argue and philosophize a bit too much, my dear sir. You know you seem to me almost, almost . . . [*Stops and looks him over from head to foot.*] Ah, by the way, I think you introduced yourself to me as a—what shall . . . we say—a "character," created by an author who did not afterwards care to make a drama of his own creations.

THE FATHER. It is the simple truth, sir.

THE MANAGER. Nonsense! Cut that out, please! None of us believes it, because it isn't a thing, as you must recognize yourself, which one can believe seriously. If you want to know, it seems to me you are trying to imitate the manner of a certain author whom I heartily detest—I warn you—although I have unfortunately bound myself to put on one of his works. As a matter of fact, I was just starting to rehearse it, when you arrived. [Turning to the ACTORS.] And this is what we've gained—out of the frying-pan into the fire!

THE FATHER. I don't know to what author you may be alluding, but believe me I feel what I think; and I seem to be philosophizing only for those who do not think what they feel, because they blind themselves with their own sentiment. I know that for many people this self-blinding seems much more "human"; but the contrary is really true. For man never reasons so much and becomes so introspective as when he suffers; since he is anxious to get at the cause of his sufferings, to learn who has produced them, and whether it is just or unjust that he should have to bear them. On the other hand, when he is happy, he takes his happiness as it comes and doesn't analyze it, just as if happiness were his right. The animals suffer without reasoning about their sufferings. But take the case of a man who suffers and begins to reason about it. Oh no! it can't be allowed! Let him suffer like an animal, and then—ah yes, he is "human!"

THE MANAGER. Look here! Look here! You're off again, philosophizing worse than ever.

THE FATHER. Because I suffer, sir! I'm not philosophizing: I'm crying aloud the reason of my sufferings.

THE MANAGER [*makes brusque movement as he is taken with a new idea*]. I should like to know if anyone has ever heard of a character who gets right out of his part and perorates and speechifies as you do. Have you ever heard of a case? I haven't.

THE FATHER. You have never met such a case, sir, because authors, as a rule, hide the labor of their creations. When the characters are really alive before their author, the latter does nothing but follow them in their action, in their words, in the situations which they suggest to him; and he has to will them the way they will themselves—for there's trouble if he doesn't. When a character is born, he acquires at once such an independence, even of his own author, that he can be imagined by everybody even in many other situations where the author never dreamed of placing him; and so he acquires for himself a meaning which the author never thought of giving him.

THE MANAGER. Yes, yes, I know this.

THE FATHER. What is there then to marvel at in us? Imagine such a misfortune for characters as I have described to you: to be born of an author's fantasy, and be denied life by him; and then answer me if these characters left alive, and yet without life, weren't right in doing what they did do and are doing now, after they have attempted everything in their power to persuade him to give them their stage life. We've all tried him in turn, I, she [*indicating the STEPDAUGHTER*] and she [*indicating the MOTHER*].

THE STEPDAUGHTER. It's true. I too have sought to tempt him, many, many times, when he has been sitting at his writing table, feeling a bit melancholy, at the twilight hour. He would sit in his armchair too lazy to switch on the light,

and all the shadows that crept into his room were full of our presence coming to tempt him. [*As if she saw herself still there by the writing table, and was annoyed by the presence of the ACTORS.*] Oh, if you would only go away, go away and leave us alone—mother here with that son of hers—I with that Child—that Boy there always alone—and then I with him—[*just hints at the FATHER*]
—and then I alone, alone . . . in those shadows! [*Makes a sudden movement as if in the vision she has of herself illuminating those shadows she wanted to seize hold of herself.*] Ah! my life! my life! Oh, what scenes we proposed to him—and I tempted him more than any of the others!

THE FATHER. Maybe. But perhaps it was your fault that he refused to give us life: because you were too insistent, too troublesome.

THE STEPDAUGHTER. Nonsense! Didn't he make me so himself? [*Goes close to the MANAGER to tell him as if in confidence.*] In my opinion he abandoned us in a fit of depression, of disgust for the ordinary theater as the public knows it and likes it.

THE SON. Exactly what it was, sir; exactly that!

THE FATHER. Not at all! Don't believe it for a minute. Listen to me! You'll be doing quite right to modify, as you suggest, the excesses both of this girl here, who wants to do too much, and of this young man, who won't do anything at all.

THE SON. No, nothing!

THE MANAGER. You too get over the mark occasionally, my dear sir, if I may say so.

THE FATHER. I? When? Where?

THE MANAGER. Always! Continuously! Then there's this insistence of yours in trying to make us believe you are a character. And then too, you must really argue and philosophize less, you know, much less.

THE FATHER. Well, if you want to take away from me the possibility of representing the torment of my spirit which never gives me peace, you will be suppressing me: that's all. Every true man, sir, who is a little above the level of the beasts and plants does not live for the sake of living, without knowing how to live; but he lives so as to give a meaning and a value of his own to life. For me this is *everything*. I cannot give up this, just to represent a mere fact as she [*indicating the STEPDAUGHTER*] wants. It's all very well for her, since her "ven-detta" lies in the "fact." I'm not going to do it. It destroys my *raison d'être*.

THE MANAGER. Your *raison d'être*! Oh, we're going ahead fine! First she starts off, and then you jump in. At this rate, we'll never finish.

THE FATHER. Now, don't be offended. Have it your own way—provided, however, that within the limits of the parts you assign us each one's sacrifice isn't too great.

THE MANAGER. You've got to understand that you can't go on arguing at your own pleasure. Drama is action, sir, action and not confounded philosophy.

THE FATHER. All right. I'll do just as much arguing and philosophizing as everybody does when he is considering his own torments.

THE MANAGER. If the drama permits! But for Heaven's sake, man, let's get along and come to the scene.

THE STEPDAUGHTER. It seems to me we've got too much action with our coming into his house. [*Indicating FATHER.*] You said, before, you couldn't change the scene every five minutes.

THE MANAGER. Of course not. What we've got to do is to combine and

group up all the facts in one simultaneous, close-knit action. We can't have it as you want, with your little brother wandering like a ghost from room to room, hiding behind doors and meditating a project which—what did you say it did to him?

THE STEPDAUGHTER. Consumes him, sir, wastes him away!

THE MANAGER. Well, it may be. And then at the same time, you want the little girl there to be playing in the garden . . . one in the house, and the other in the garden: isn't that it?

THE STEPDAUGHTER. Yes, in the sun, in the sun! That is my only pleasure: to see her happy and careless in the garden after the misery and squalor of the horrible room where we all four slept together. And I had to sleep with her—I, do you understand?—with my vile contaminated body next to hers with her folding me fast in her loving little arms. In the garden, whenever she spied me, she would run to take me by the hand. She didn't care for the big flowers, only the little ones; and she loved to show me them and pet me.

THE MANAGER. Well then, we'll have it in the garden. Everything shall happen in the garden; and we'll group the other scenes there. [*Calls a stage hand.*] Here, a back-cloth with trees and something to do as a fountain basin. [*Turning around to look at the back of the stage.*] Ah, you've fixed it up. Good! [*To the STEPDAUGHTER.*] This is just to give an idea, of course. The boy, instead of hiding behind the doors, will wander about here in the garden, hiding behind the trees. But it's going to be rather difficult to find a child to do that scene with you where she shows you the flowers. [*Turning to the YOUTH.*] Come forward a little, will you please? Let's try it now! Come along! come along! [*Then seeing him come shyly forward, full of fear and looking lost.*] It's a nice business, this lad here. What's the matter with him? We'll have to give him a word or two to say. [*Goes close to him, puts a hand on his shoulders, and leads him behind one of the trees.*] Come on! come on! Let me see you a little! Hide here . . . yes, like that. Try and show your head just a little as if you were looking for someone . . . [*Goes back to observe the effect, when the BOY at once goes through the action.*] Excellent! fine! [*Turning to the STEPDAUGHTER.*] Suppose the little girl there were to surprise him as he looks round, and run over to him, so we could give him a word or two to say?

THE STEPDAUGHTER. It's useless to hope he will speak, as long as that fellow there is here . . . [*Indicates the SON.*] You must send him away first.

THE SON [*jumping up*]. Delighted! delighted! I don't ask for anything better. [*Begins to move away.*]

THE MANAGER [*at once stopping him*]. No! No! Where are you going? Wait a bit!

[*The MOTHER gets up alarmed and terrified at the thought the he is really about to go away. Instinctively she lifts her arms to prevent him, without, however, leaving her seat.*]

THE SON [*to MANAGER who stops him*]. I've got nothing to do with this affair. Let me go please! Let me go!

THE MANAGER. What do you mean by saying you've got nothing to do with this?

THE STEPDAUGHTER [*calmly, with irony*]. Don't bother to stop him: he won't go away.

THE FATHER. He has to act the terrible scene in the garden with his mother.

THE SON [*suddenly resolute and with dignity*]. I shall act nothing at all. I've said so from the very beginning. [*To the MANAGER.*] Let me go!

THE STEPDAUGHTER [*going over to the MANAGER*]. Allow me? [*Puts down the MANAGER's arm, which is restraining the SON.*] Well, go away then, if you want to! [*The SON looks at her with contempt and hatred. She laughs and says.*] You see, he can't, he can't go away! He is obliged to stay here, indissolubly bound to the chain. If I, who fly off when that happens which has to happen, because I can't bear him—if I am still here and support that face and expression of his, you can well imagine that he is unable to move. He has to remain here, has to stop with that nice father of his, and that mother whose only son he is. [*Turning to the MOTHER.*] Come on, mother, come along! [*Turning to the MANAGER to indicate her.*] You see, she was getting up to keep him back. [*To the MOTHER, beckoning her with her hand.*] Come on! come on! [*Then to the MANAGER.*] You can imagine how little she wants to show these actors of yours what she really feels; but so eager is she to get near him that . . . There, you see? She is willing to act her part. [*And in fact, the MOTHER approaches him; and as soon as the STEPDAUGHTER has finished speaking, opens her arms to signify that she consents.*]

THE SON [*suddenly*]. No! no! I can't go away, then I'll stop here; but I repeat: I act nothing!

THE FATHER [*to the MANAGER excitedly*]. You can force him, sir.

THE SON. Nobody can force me.

THE FATHER. I can.

THE STEPDAUGHTER. Wait a minute, wait . . . First of all, the baby has to go to the fountain . . . [*Runs to take the CHILD and leads her to the fountain.*]

THE MANAGER. Yes, yes of course; that's it. Both at the same time.

[*The SECOND LADY LEAD and the JUVENILE LEAD at this point separate themselves from the group of ACTORS. One watches the MOTHER attentively; the other moves about studying the movements and manner of the SON, whom he will have to act.*]

THE SON [*to the MANAGER*]. What do you mean by both at the same time? It isn't right. There was no scene between me and her. [*Indicates the MOTHER.*] Ask her how it was!

THE MOTHER. Yes, it's true. I had come into his room . . .

THE SON. Into my room, do you understand? Nothing to do with the garden.

THE MANAGER. It doesn't matter. Haven't I told you we've got to group the action?

THE SON [*observing the JUVENILE LEAD studying him*]. What do you want?

THE JUVENILE LEAD. Nothing! I was just looking at you.

THE SON [*turning towards the SECOND LADY LEAD*]. Ah! she's at it too: to re-act her part [*indicating the MOTHER*]!

THE MANAGER. Exactly! And it seems to me that you ought to be grateful to them for their interest.

THE SON. Yes, but haven't you yet perceived that it isn't possible to live

in front of a mirror which not only freezes us with the image of ourselves, but throws our likeness back at us with a horrible grimace?

THE FATHER. That is true, absolutely true. You must see that.

THE MANAGER [*to the SECOND LADY LEAD and the JUVENILE LEAD*]. He's right! Move away from them!

THE SON. Do as you like. I'm out of this!

THE MANAGER. Be quiet, you, will you? And let me hear your mother! [*To the MOTHER.*] You were saying you had entered . . .

THE MOTHER. Yes, into his room, because I couldn't stand it any longer. I went to empty my heart to him of all the anguish that tortures me . . . But as soon as he saw me come in . . .

THE SON. Nothing happened! There was no scene. I went away, that's all! I don't care for scenes!

THE MOTHER. It's true, true. That's how it was.

THE MANAGER. Well now, we've got to do this bit between you and him. It's indispensable.

THE MOTHER. I'm ready . . . when you are ready. If you could only find a chance for me to tell him what I feel here in my heart.

THE FATHER [*going to SON in a great rage*]. You'll do this for your mother, for your mother, do you understand?

THE SON [*quite determined*]. I do nothing!

THE FATHER [*taking hold of him and shaking him*]. For God's sake, do as I tell you! Don't you hear your mother asking you for a favor? Haven't you even got the guts to be a son?

THE SON [*taking hold of the FATHER*]. No! No! And for God's sake stop it, or else . . . [*General agitation. The MOTHER, frightened, tries to separate them.*]

THE MOTHER [*pleading*]. Please! please!

THE FATHER [*not leaving hold of the SON*]. You've got to obey, do you hear?

THE SON [*almost crying from rage*]. What does it mean, this madness you've got? [*They separate.*] Have you no decency, that you insist on showing everyone our shame? I won't do it! I won't! And I stand for the will of our author in this. He didn't want to put us on the stage, after all!

THE MANAGER. Man alive! You came here . . .

THE SON [*indicating the FATHER*]. He did! I didn't!

THE MANAGER. Aren't you here now?

THE SON. It was his wish, and he dragged us along with him. He's told you not only the things that did happen, but also things that have never happened at all.

THE MANAGER. Well, tell me then what did happen. You went out of your room without saying a word?

THE SON. Without a word, so as to avoid a scene!

THE MANAGER. And then what did you do?

THE SON. Nothing . . . walking in the garden . . . [*Hesitates for a moment with expression of gloom.*]

THE MANAGER [*coming closer to him, interested by his extraordinary reserve*]. Well, well . . . walking in the garden . . .

THE SON [*exasperated*]. Why on earth do you insist? It's horrible! [*The MOTHER trembles, sobs, and looks towards the fountain.*]

THE MANAGER [*slowly observing the glance and turning towards the SON with increasing apprehension*]. The baby?

THE SON. There in the fountain . . .

THE FATHER [*pointing with tender pity to the MOTHER*]. She was following him at the moment . . .

THE SON. I ran over to her; I was jumping in to drag her out when I saw something that froze my blood . . . the boy there standing stock still, with eyes like a madman's, watching his little drowned sister, in the fountain! [*The STEPDAUGHTER bends over the fountain to hide the CHILD. She sobs.*] Then . . . [*A revolver shot rings out behind the trees where the BOY is hidden.*]

THE MOTHER [*with a cry of terror runs over in that direction together with several of the ACTORS amid general confusion*]. My son! My son! [*Then amid the cries and exclamations one hears her voice.*] Help! Help!

THE MANAGER [*pushing the ACTORS aside while they lift up the BOY and carry him off*]. Is he really wounded?

SOME ACTORS. He's dead! dead!

OTHER ACTORS. No, no, it's only make believe, it's only pretence!

THE FATHER [*with a terrible cry*]. Pretence? Reality, sir, reality!

THE MANAGER. Pretence? Reality? To hell with it all! Never in my life has such a thing happened to me. I've lost a whole day over these people, a whole day!

Curtain

COMMENTARY

The essence of the theatre, as everyone is quick to understand, is illusion. The theatre sets out to induce in an audience the belief that the things and events it presents are not what they are known to be. The man on the stage who wears a crown and a purple robe and stalks with so stately a tread is a salaried actor who will go home after the performance to a light supper, a glass of beer, and bed. The audience knows this to be so but consents to accept him as "the King" and it has appropriate emotions when, in the course of the play, his "sacred" person is assaulted. Of course these emotions are not the same as would be felt by actual loyal subjects witnessing an actual attempt upon the life of their ruler, but they are consonant with the actual situation and they are often intense.

The audience comes to the performance with good will toward the theatre's designs upon it, with every intention of submitting to such illusion as the theatre can produce. The theatre, for its part, undertakes to provide the audience with adequate ground for suspending or mitigating its ordinary common-sense knowledge. The range of means by which the theatre brings about a successful illusion is wide. It includes, among other things, the distance set between the audience and the actors, scenery and lighting-effects, costume and make-up, the mimetic skill of the actors, the kind of language the actors are given to speak. The number of such devices employed varies considerably from epoch to

epoch. Some cultural periods require more of them, some less. Victorian audiences would have considered inadequate the bare stage with which the Elizabethans were quite content. In our own day, the theatre is eclectic in its modes of production, which sometimes are very elaborate, sometimes so sparse as to suggest that all the theatre needs in order to bring illusion into being is to show that it wishes to do so.

Yet in the degree that the theatre is devoted to illusion, it delights in destroying it, or in seeming to destroy it. The word *illusion* comes from the Latin word meaning "to mock" (*illudere*), which in turn comes from the word meaning "to play" (*ludere*), and a favorite activity of the theatre is to play with the idea of illusion itself, to mock the very thing it most tries to create—and the audience that accepts it. Sometimes, having brought the illusion into being, it seems to suggest that it has no belief whatever in its own creation.

An amusing example of this occurs far back in the history of the theatre. The ancient Athenian drama was sacred to the god Dionysus, and the only time plays were presented was at the festival in his honor. On these occasions the priest of the god's cult presided over the performance and sat in the audience in a place of honor close to the stage. In one of the comedies of Aristophanes, *The Frogs*, the chief character is the god himself; he is represented as an arrant coward, and at one point in the action, when threatened with a beating, the comic Dionysus runs from the stage toward the audience and throws himself at the feet of the presiding priest whose protection he claims. The priest would seem to have been visibly disconcerted by this unexpected turn of events, and the Dionysus-character mocked his blushes and other signs of embarrassment.

No doubt the audience found the episode especially funny, and in a way that was different from the other comic moments in the play. The sudden destruction of the assumptions that the spectators had been making, the unexpected mingling of the world of the stage with the world of actuality, surely delighted the Athenians as similar shocks to their expectation have delighted all audiences since. Nothing that the theatre does is more engaging than its disclosing its own theatricality, its opening to question the illusion it has contrived. When Hamlet discusses the art of acting with the strolling players who have come to Elsinore there is always a little stir of new attention in the audience as it receives this reminder that the Prince of Denmark is himself an actor, and the excitement increases when, in a succeeding scene, the players act before the royal court the beginning of a crude little drama called "The Murder of Gonzago." This play-within-a-play is much less "real" than the play that contains it and it is usually acted in a stilted, unrealistic manner to emphasize the difference. But it has the effect of recalling to us that *Hamlet* is itself "merely" a play. Part of our experience of *Hamlet* becomes the awareness of the theatre itself—and of the theatre's awareness of itself.

One reason why these awarenesses—ours of the theatre and the theatre's of itself—are so engaging is that they relate to a primitive tendency to question the reality of what is commonly accepted as reality, to speculate whether life itself is not an illusion. The tendency may justly be called primitive because it is so commonly observed in children, who often have moments of thinking that all that goes on around them is but a show devised (sometimes with the purpose of putting them to a "test") by some supernal agency. This supposition of the nonreality of the actual world is of great importance in philosophic

thought. Plato conceived of all that we see and know as the simulacrum of a reality that is concealed from us, and the continued interest of philosophers in the question of whether what we know is consonant with what really is made possible Alfred North Whitehead's statement that all succeeding philosophy is but "a series of footnotes to Plato." That life is a dream has often been said. Sometimes life is spoken of as a game. It is also said to be a play, and this is perhaps the most common expression of the impulse to doubt life's literal reality. Jaques' famous speech in *As You Like It*, "All the world's a stage / And all the men and women merely players," sums up an idea that has established itself in our language—we naturally speak of the "part" a person "plays" in life or in some particular situation, and of the way in which he fulfills his "rôle." Indeed the very word *person* suggests the theatre, for the original meaning of the Latin word *persona* was the mask worn by the actors of antiquity.

Of all the theatre's many celebrations of its own mysterious power, of all the challenging comparisons it makes between its own reality and that of life, Pirandello's *Six Characters in Search of an Author* is the most elaborate and brilliant. It carries the fascinating contrivance of the play-within-a-play to the point where it becomes a play-about-a-play. One might say that its *dramatis personae* are the elements of the theatre itself, all of them, as the author himself observed, in conflict with one another. The Six Characters have been "rejected" by the author, or at least he has declared himself unwilling to present their drama. The director, who despises the plays of Pirandello which he is required to put on, consents, after some resistance, to show interest in the Characters, but he finds them difficult and eventually not very satisfactory. The actors who are to play the Characters are contemptuous of them and hostile to them, an attitude which is reciprocated by the Father and the Stepdaughter, both because the actors have no drama of their own and also because they falsify the essence of the characters they play. The illusion of the theatre is wholly negated: we are permitted—forced, indeed—to see the bare stage and the shabby "properties" that are used for its contrivance. Yet of course, in spite of the civil war taking place within it, the theater realizes its familiar purpose. We of the audience do indeed believe in the reality of the Characters who are said to have been denied their existence by the author; we are fascinated and distressed by their painful situation and shocked by its outcome. The theatre as Pirandello represents it is very much like life itself, always at odds with itself, always getting in its own way, yet always pursuing and, in the end, having its way.

It is, of course, life itself that the Characters hope that the theatre will give them, and they are not concerned with distinguishing between real life and theatrical life, between life as people and life as characters. "The drama is in us and we are the drama," says the Father. "We are impatient to play it. Our inner passion drives us on to this." The Father's speech confirms—in this most un-Aristotelian play—Aristotle's idea that a drama is not the representation of a person but of an action.

Yet there is a distinction to be observed among the various ways in which the Characters think about the possibility of their realization. The Father and the Stepdaughter are fierce and explicit in their demand that they be permitted to come into existence through the acting out of their drama. Painful and shameful as their fate is, they insist upon fulfilling and demonstrating it, they may be said to love it as the means by which they attain life—they *are* their fate, they are the

drama it makes. The Son, however, wants no part of the drama in which he is inextricably, although marginally, involved. It can only distress and disgust him. He is, he says, an "unrealized" character" and wishes to remain just that. And we, aware of the pale, thin censoriousness and self-regard that make him stand aloof from his ill-fated family, agree with his estimate of the quality of his existence, except that we take him to be personally rather than dramatically unrealized: to us he seems fully projected as the dramatic representation of an unrealized person, one whose being is in the control of his personal deficiencies. His refusal to take part in the drama as a Character is tantamount to refusing to be what in colloquial speech we call a "real person," someone whose force or courage or definiteness we necessarily perceive. Yet, for all his objection to being implicated in the drama, and despite his repugnance to the family's fate, he has had to come to the theatre as part of the family; and when, in a moment of indignation, he says that he is leaving the situation from which he is so alienated, he does not go, he cannot go. Whatever his desire may be, he is bound to the family fate and has his part in its drama; against his will, he is *in* life even though he does not occupy much space in it.

As for the Mother, she is incapable of conceiving herself as dramatic. She is wholly committed to her motherly functions and feelings and for her such ideas as "fate" and "existence," let alone "drama," have no meaning. She cannot conceive them because to do so requires a double vision that she lacks: the ability to stand off from her function and feelings and observe them. The Father, the Stepdaughter—and even, in his own dim way, the Son—have this capacity; they "see themselves" and they put a value upon what they see. But the Mother, who cannot see herself, sets no value upon herself. It is not merely that, like the Son, she objects to being in this particular drama; the very idea of drama, since it involves observation and a degree of conceptualization, is offensive to her: it belittles the actuality of life. She is, Pirandello says in his Preface to the play, realized as Nature, while the Father and the Stepdaughter (and in some degree the Son) are realized as Mind.

In the preface Pirandello speaks of "the inherent tragic conflict between life (which is always moving and changing) and form (which fixes it, immutable)." The conflict is not only tragic but ironic, for the "form" that Pirandello conceives of as the antagonist of "life" would seem to be brought into being by life itself for the furtherance of life. (A similar idea is central to Thomas Mann's story, "Disorder and Early Sorrow" [*Fiction*, pages 261 ff.].) The Characters exist, they live, by reason of their fixity and immutability: the word *character* derives from the Greek word meaning to engrave, and it suggests the quality of permanence. The Father and the Stepdaughter are committed to repeat the situation that pains and shames them; they cannot move beyond it, yet it is through this compulsive reliving of the past, which denies a future in which they might move and change, that they achieve their reality of existence, their life. Realized as Mind, they are fixed by the form appropriate to Mind, their idea of themselves. The Mother, realized as Nature, is fixed by the form appropriate to Nature, her instinctual blind devotion to her maternal function of bringing life into being and preserving it.

PURGATORY

WILLIAM BUTLER YEATS

1865-1939

CHARACTERS

A BOY

AN OLD MAN

SCENE: *A ruined house and a bare tree in the background.*

BOY. Half-door, hall door,
Hither and thither day and night,
Hill or hollow, shouldering this pack,
Hearing you talk.

OLD MAN. Study that house.
I think about its jokes and stories;
I try to remember what the butler
Said to a drunken gamekeeper
In mid-October, but I cannot.
If I cannot, none living can.
Where are the jokes and stories of a house,
Its threshold gone to patch a pig-sty?

BOY. So you have come this path before?

OLD MAN. The moonlight falls upon the path,
The shadow of a cloud upon the house,
And that's symbolical; study that tree,
What is it like?

BOY. A silly old man.

OLD MAN. It's like—no matter what it's like.
I saw it a year ago stripped bare as now,
So I chose a better trade.
I saw it fifty years ago
Before the thunderbolt had riven it,
Green leaves, ripe leaves, leaves thick as butter,
Fat, greasy life. Stand there and look,
Because there is somebody in that house.

[*The BOY puts down pack and stands in the doorway.*]

BOY. There's nobody here.

OLD MAN. There's somebody there.

BOY. The floor is gone, the window's gone,
And where there should be roof there's sky,
And here's a bit of an egg-shell thrown
Out of a jackdaw's nest.

OLD MAN. But there are some
That do not care what's gone, what's left:
The souls of Purgatory that come back
To habitations and familiar spots.

BOY. Your wits are out again.

OLD MAN. Re-live
Their transgressions, and that not once
But many times; they know at last
The consequence of those transgressions
Whether upon others or upon themselves;
Upon others, others may bring help,
For when the consequence is at an end
The dream must end; if upon themselves,
There is no help but in themselves
And in the mercy of God.

BOY. I have had enough!
Talk to the jackdaws, if talk you must.

OLD MAN. Stop! Sit there upon that stone.
That is the house where I was born.

BOY. The big old house that was burnt down?

OLD MAN. My mother that was your grand-dam owned it,
This scenery and this countryside,
Kennel and stable, horse and hound—
She had a horse at Curragh,¹ and there met
My father, a groom in the training stable,
Looked at him and married him.
Her mother never spoke to her again,

¹ A plain in County Kildare, Ireland.

And she did right.

BOY. What's right and wrong?

My grand-dad got the girl and the money.

OLD MAN. Looked at him and married him,
And he squandered everything she had.
She never knew the worst, because
She died in giving birth to me,
But now she knows it all, being dead.

Great people lived and died in this house;
Magistrates, colonels, members of Parliament,
Captains and Governors, and long ago
Men that had fought at Aughrim² and the Boyne.³
Some that had gone on government work
To London or to India came home to die,
Or came from London every spring
To look at the may-blossom in the park.
They had loved the trees that he cut down
To pay what he had lost at cards
Or spent on horses, drink, and women;
Had loved the house, had loved all
The intricate passages of the house,
But he killed the house; to kill a house
Where great men grew up, married, died,
I here declare a capital offense.

BOY. My God, but you had luck! Grand clothes,
And maybe a grand horse to ride.

OLD MAN. That he might keep me upon his level
He never sent me to school, but some
Half-loved me for my half of her:
A gamekeeper's wife taught me to read,
A Catholic curate taught me Latin.
There were old books and books made fine
By eighteenth-century French binding, books
Modern and ancient, books by the ton.

BOY. What education have you given me?

OLD MAN. I gave the education that befits
A bastard that a pedlar got
Upon a tinker's daughter in a ditch.
When I had come to sixteen years old
My father burned down the house when drunk.

BOY. But that is my age, sixteen years old,
At the Puck Fair.-

OLD MAN. And everything was burnt;
Books, library, all were burnt.

BOY. Is what I have heard upon the road the truth,

² In 1691, William III (William and Mary) won a decisive victory over James II for the English throne at Aughrim. The Irish forces, who fought under the Catholic James II, suffered great losses.

³ William had earlier (1690) and less decisively defeated James at the river Boyne.

That you killed him in the burning house?

OLD MAN. There's nobody here but our two selves?

BOY. Nobody, Father.

OLD MAN.

I stuck him with a knife,

That knife that cuts my dinner now,

And after that I left him in the fire.

They dragged him out, somebody saw

The knife wound but could not be certain

Because the body was all black and charred.

Then some that were his drunken friends

Swore they would put me upon trial,

Spoke of quarrels, a threat I had made.

The gamekeeper gave me some old clothes,

I ran away, worked here and there

Till I became a pedlar on the roads,

No good trade, but good enough

Because I am my father's son,

Because of what I did or may do.

Listen to the hoof-beats! Listen, listen!

BOY. I cannot hear a sound.

OLD MAN.

Beat! Beat!

This night is the anniversary

Of my mother's wedding night,

Or of the night wherein I was begotten.

My father is riding from the public-house,

A whiskey-bottle under his arm.

[*A window is lit showing a young girl.*]

Look at the window; she stands there

Listening, the servants are all in bed,

She is alone, he has stayed late

Bragging and drinking in the public-house.

BOY. There's nothing but an empty gap in the wall.

You have made it up. No, you are mad!

You are getting madder every day.

OLD MAN. It's louder now because he rides

Upon a graveled avenue

All grass today. The hoof-beat stops,

He has gone to the other side of the house,

Gone to the stable, put the horse up.

She has gone down to open the door.

This night she is no better than her man

And does not mind that he is half drunk,

She is mad about him. They mount the stairs.

She brings him into her own chamber.

And that is the marriage-chamber now.

The window is dimly lit again.

Do not let him touch you! It is not true

That drunken men cannot beget,

And if he touch he must beget
And you must bear his murderer, ✕
Deaf! Both deaf! If I should throw
A stick or a stone they would not hear;
And that's a proof my wits are out.
But there's a problem: she must live
Through everything in exact detail,
Driven to it by remorse, and yet
Can she renew the sexual act
And find no pleasure in it, and if not,
If pleasure and remorse must both be there,
Which is the greater?

I lack schooling.

Go fetch Tertullian;⁴ he and I
Will ravel all that problem out
Whilst those two lie upon the mattress
Begetting me.

Come back! Come back!

And so you thought to slip away,
My bag of money between your fingers,
And that I could not talk and see!
You have been rummaging in the pack.

[The light in the window has faded out.]

BOY. You never gave me my right share.

OLD MAN. And had I given it, young as you are,
You would have spent it upon drink.

BOY. What if I did? I had a right
To get it and spend it as I chose.

OLD MAN. Give me that bag and no more words.

BOY. I will not.

OLD MAN. I will break your fingers.

[They struggle for the bag. In the struggle it drops, scattering the money. The OLD MAN staggers but does not fall. They stand looking at each other. The window is lit up. A man is seen pouring whiskey into a glass.]

BOY. What if I killed you? You killed my grand-dad.
Because you were young and he was old.
Now I am young and you are old.

OLD MAN *[staring at window]*. Better-looking, those sixteen years——

BOY. What are you muttering?

OLD MAN. Younger—and yet

She should have known he was not her kind.

BOY. What are you saying? Out with it!

[OLD MAN points to window.]

My God! The window is lit up
And somebody stands there, although

⁴ The first Christian theologian to write extensively in Latin. His works, which are greatly admired for their personal, yet powerful, style, bear the stamp of his juridical training.

The floorboards are all burnt away.

OLD MAN. The window is lit up because my father
Has come to find a glass for his whiskey.
He leans there like some tired beast.

BOY. A dead, living, murdered man!

OLD MAN. "Then the bride-sleep fell upon Adam":
Where did I read those words?

And yet

There's nothing leaning in the window
But the impression upon my mother's mind;
Being dead she is alone in her remorse.

BOY. A body that was a bundle of old bones
Before I was born. Horrible! Horrible!

[*He covers his eyes.*]

OLD MAN. That beast there would know nothing, being nothing,
If I should kill a man under the window
He would not even turn his head.

[*He stabs the BOY.*]

My father and my son on the same jack-knife!
That finishes—there—there—there—

[*He stabs again and again. The window grows dark.*]

"Hush-a-bye baby, thy father's a knight,
Thy mother a lady, lovely and bright."
No, that is something that I read in a book,
And if I sing it must be to my mother,
And I lack rhyme.

[*The stage has grown dark except where the tree stands in white light.*]

Study that tree.

It stands there like a purified soul,
All cold, sweet, glistening light.
Dear mother, the window is dark again,
But you are in the light because,
I finished all that consequence.
I killed that lad because had he grown up
He would have struck a woman's fancy,
Begot, and passed pollution on.

I am a wretched foul old man
And therefore harmless. When I have stuck
This old jack-knife into a sod⁵
And pulled it out all bright again,
And picked up all the money that he dropped,
I'll to a distant place, and there
Tell my old jokes among new men.

[*He cleans the knife and begin to pick up money.*]

Hoof-beats! Dear God,
How quickly it returns—beat—beat—!

⁵ A piece of turf.

Her mind cannot hold up that dream.
Twice a murderer and all for nothing,
And she must animate that dead night
Not once but many times!

O God,
Release my mother's soul from its dream!
Mankind can do no more. Appease
The misery of the living and the remorse of the dead.

COMMENTARY

The ghost or *revenant*—the spirit of a dead person returned to the world of the living and manifesting its presence in some physical way—has its established place in modern literature. But of course it is established only as a literary convention—few people actually believe in the existence of ghosts. The author of a ghost-story takes this for granted. He himself, in all likelihood, does not believe in ghosts, and all that he counts on in the reader is a readiness to make what Coleridge called a “willing suspension of disbelief.” If the reader consents to suspend his disbelief and if the author is sufficiently skilful, he can lead the reader's imagination to entertain feelings similar to those that would attend an actual experience of a ghost. Reader and author enter into an agreement, as it were, to make believe—or to *make belief*—for as long as the story lasts.

But Yeats entered into no such argument with the reader when he wrote *Purgatory*. His attitude toward the ghosts in his play is wholly the opposite of what we expect from a modern writer. When *Purgatory* was first produced—at the Abbey Theatre, Dublin, in 1939—the author was present and was called to the stage to respond to the applause of the audience. In the course of his speech he said, “I have put nothing into the play because it seemed picturesque; I have put here my own conviction about this world and the next.” He meant that he believed quite literally in life after death, in the actuality of the spirits of the dead manifesting themselves as they do in the play, and in the complex conditions of the after-life that the action of the play implies. And *Purgatory* is by no means his only expression of this belief in the occult and the preternatural—from young manhood on, it stood at the very center of Yeats's intellectual and creative life. It is affirmed in many of his plays and poems and in *A Vision*, the book in which he gives a systematic account of the relation of human life to supernatural forces.

To some readers this belief will seem so bizarre that they will scarcely credit Yeats's own affirmation of it. Indeed, some critics have denied that Yeats really held the ideas he enunciated, saying that they were an elaborate fiction which he deliberately maintained because it aided his poetic imagination. I do not share this opinion. It may be that there was some ambiguity in Yeats's belief in the supernatural, or a degree of irony, but I am certain, as are most students of Yeats, that he believed what he said he believed.

A person of extremely rationalistic temper might be alienated from Yeats's play by the occultism and preternaturalism that inform it. Such a reader might say that he was perfectly willing to be entertained, or even affected, by a ghost-

play if the ghosts are conceived of in the usual modern way, as a literary convention, but that, because he cannot accept the actuality of ghosts, he can take no interest in a moral situation which is based on the assumption that ghosts exist. Most people, however, will not be so absolute. While they will perceive that Yeats's literalness of belief puts a demand upon them to believe as Yeats does, and although they will no doubt refuse this demand, the knowledge that Yeats literally believed what he set forth is likely to enhance rather than diminish the effect of the play. However much we may be attracted by those elements of a work which Yeats calls "picturesque," our response to what he calls his "conviction" is bound to be graver and solider. It is one thing to suspend our disbelief in improbable or, as most of us would say, impossible circumstances. It is quite another thing, and a far more momentous one, to suspend our disbelief in what to someone else is a conviction, especially if it is a conviction about the nature of man's destiny.

My own experience with *Purgatory* may be in point. When I read the play for the first time, I supposed it to be nothing more than "picturesque." I thought that Yeats had been chiefly concerned to contrive a situation which would allow the expression of an extreme—an ultimate—rage against life and disgust with it, emotions so intense that they would lead a man to destroy not only his own father but his own son, both the root and the fruit of his life. Taking this view of the play, I regarded the ghosts as a device for telling about past events in an immediate and vivid way. So understood, the play had considerable interest for me. The spareness of its verse, the harshness of its diction, and the violence of its action commanded my attention and engaged my curiosity. But when I read Yeats's statement about the literalness of his belief in life after death and then looked into the details of his conviction, I found that the play began to exert a new and more imperative power. And perhaps it will suggest how much greater this power was if I say that although, on my first reading of the play, its conscious reminiscences of *King Lear* seemed to me rather presumptuous, as did the reference to *Oedipus Rex* which we must inevitably suppose the action implies, these allusions seemed entirely appropriate after I had understood that I was confronting Yeats's "conviction about this world and the next." I saw *Purgatory* as being, like *Oedipus Rex* and *King Lear*, a tragic confrontation of destiny, less grand than its predecessors but not less intense.

Yeats's conviction about the life after death is given systematic expression in Book III of *A Vision*, a strange work which may be described as a theory of history and a theory of personality, a detailed statement of how things happen in the world and why people are as they are. It takes for granted the existence of supernatural forces and of personal entities apart from the flesh; it represents the human soul as going through a continuous cycle of birth, death, and purification, and describes this process in detail. How Yeats came into possession of this information is explained in the introduction to the volume, which tells how certain teacher-spirits undertook to instruct him and did so over a period of years, communicating with him through Mrs. Yeats by means of automatic writing.

According to *A Vision*, the career of the soul after death is complex, but to understand *Purgatory* it is enough to know that after the soul is separated from the body at death it is not separated from its passions, its pains, and—this is of particular importance to the play—from the consequences of its actions during

life. In order to achieve freedom, the soul must purge away these elements of its fleshly existence that still remain in its imagination. It accomplishes this by returning to its fleshly experiences, seeking to understand them and to disengage itself from them. The process—it has something of the aspect of a spiritual psychoanalysis—can, Yeats tells us, go on for a very long time.¹ He says that where the soul has great intensity and where the consequences of its passions have affected great numbers of people, the process of purging its passion and its experience “may last with diminishing pain and joy for centuries.” But in the work of liberation, the dead can be aided by the living, who are able, Yeats says, “to assist the imaginations of the dead.”

Only when we are aware of all this can we begin to understand the Old Man’s motive in murdering the Boy. He kills his son in order, as he says, to finish “all that consequence.”

I killed that lad because had he grown up
He would have struck a woman’s fancy,
Begot, and passed pollution on.

He believes that, by bringing the “consequence” to an end, he will free his mother’s spirit from her sexual passion so that it will be “all cold, sweet, glistening light,” and for a moment, after the murder of his son, he supposes that he has accomplished his intention.

Dear mother, the window is dark again,
But you are in the light because
I finished all that consequence.

But he hears the hoofbeats of his father returning to enact yet again the moment of his conception and he knows that he is “twice a murderer and all for nothing.” Inevitably we ask why he failed. And so far do we go in our willing suspension of disbelief in Yeats’s conviction that we speculate about the reason in terms of Yeats’ own account of the process of the spirit’s liberation. We find it possible to suppose, that is, that the Old Man’s act of killing the Boy is itself a “consequence,” that it is charged with the passion of hatred and contempt. And how, we ask, can the Old Man believe that he has “finished all that consequence” when he himself, a chief consequence, remains? In other words, we find ourselves—to our amusement—putting rational questions on the basis of a system of belief to which we deny rationality.

¹ The Characters of *Six Characters in Search of an Author* are similarly compelled to re-enact the painful experiences that define their being, but not for the purpose of understanding them and of becoming detached from them.

GALILEO

BERTOLT BRECHT

1898-1956

It is my opinion that the earth is very noble and admirable by reason of so many and so different alterations and generations which are incessantly made therein

GALILEO GALILEI

CHARACTERS

GALILEO GALILEI

ANDREA SARTI (*two actors: boy and man*)

MRS. SARTI

LUDOVICO MARSILI

PRIULI, THE CURATOR

SAGREDO, *Galileo's friend*

VIRGINIA GALILEI

TWO SENATORS

MATTI, *an iron founder*

PHILOSOPHER (*later, Rector of the University*)

ELDERLY LADY

YOUNG LADY

FEDERZONI, *assistant to Galileo*

MATHEMATICIAN

LORD CHAMBERLAIN

FAT PRELATE

TWO SCHOLARS

TWO MONKS

INFURIATED MONK

OLD CARDINAL

ATTENDANT MONK

CHRISTOPHER CLAVIUS

LITTLE MONK

TWO SECRETARIES

CARDINAL BELLARMIN

CARDINAL BARBERINI

CARDINAL INQUISITOR

YOUNG GIRL

HER FRIEND

GIUSEPPE

STREET SINGER

HIS WIFE

REVELLER
A LOUD VOICE
INFORMER
TOWN CRIER
OFFICIAL

PEASANT
CUSTOMS OFFICER
BOY
SENATORS, OFFICIALS, PROFESSORS,
LADIES, GUESTS, CHILDREN

There are two wordless roles: THE DOGE in Scene II and PRINCE COSMO DI MEDICI in Scene IV. The ballad of Scene IX is filled out by a pantomime: among the individuals in the pantomimic crowd are three extras (including the "KING OF HUNGARY"), COBBLER'S BOY, THREE CHILDREN, PEASANT WOMAN, MONK, RICH COUPLE, DWARF, BEGGAR, and GIRL.

SCENE I

*In the year sixteen hundred and nine
Science' light began to shine.
At Padua City, in a modest house
Galileo Galilei set out to prove
The sun is still, the earth is on the move.¹*

GALILEO's scantily furnished study. Morning. GALILEO is washing himself. A bare-footed boy, ANDREA, son of his housekeeper, MRS. SARTI, enters with a big astronomical model.

GALILEO. Where did you get that thing?

ANDREA. The coachman brought it.

GALILEO. Who sent it?

ANDREA. It said "From the Court of Naples" on the box.

GALILEO. I don't want their stupid presents. Illuminated manuscripts, a statue of Hercules the size of an elephant—they never send money.

ANDREA. But isn't this an astronomical instrument, Mr. Galilei?

GALILEO. That is an antique too. An expensive toy.

ANDREA. What's it for?

GALILEO. It's a map of the sky according to the wise men of ancient Greece. Bosh! We'll try and sell it to the university. They still teach it there.

ANDREA. How does it work, Mr. Galilei?

GALILEO. It's complicated.

ANDREA. I think I could understand it.

GALILEO [*interested*]. Maybe. Let's begin at the beginning. Description!

ANDREA. There are metal rings, a lot of them.

GALILEO. How many?

ANDREA. Eight.

GALILEO. Correct. And?

ANDREA. There are words painted on the bands.

GALILEO. What words?

ANDREA. The names of stars.

GALILEO. Such as?

¹ In the original production these initial verses were sung by a small group of choir-boys.

ANDREA. Here is a band with the sun on it and on the inside band is the moon.

GALILEO. Those metal bands represent crystal globes, eight of them.

ANDREA. Crystal?

GALILEO. Like huge soap bubbles one inside the other and the stars are supposed to be tacked on to them. Spin the band with the sun on it. [ANDREA does.] You see the fixed ball in the middle?

ANDREA. Yes.

GALILEO. That's the earth. For two thousand years man has chosen to believe that the sun and all the host of stars revolve about him. Well. The Pope, the Cardinals, the princes, the scholars, captains, merchants, housewives, have pictured themselves squatting in the middle of an affair like that.

ANDREA. Locked up inside?

GALILEO [*triumphant*]. Ah!

ANDREA. It's like a cage.

GALILEO. So you sensed that. [*Against the model.*] I like to think the ships began it.

ANDREA. Why?

GALILEO. They used to hug the coasts and then all of a sudden they left the coasts and spread over the oceans. A new age was coming. I was on to it years ago. I was a young man, in Siena. There was a group of masons arguing. They had to raise a block of granite. It was hot. To help matters, one of them wanted to try a new arrangement of ropes. After five minutes' discussion, out went a method which had been employed for a thousand years. The millenium of faith is ended, said I, this is the millenium of doubt. And we are pulling out of that contraption. The sayings of the wise men won't wash any more. Everybody, at last, is getting nose-y. I predict that in our time astronomy will become the gossip of the market place and the sons of fishwives will pack the schools.

ANDREA. You're off again, Mr. Galilei. Give me the towel. [*He wipes some soap from GALILEO's back.*]

GALILEO. By that time, with any luck, they will be learning that the earth rolls round the sun, and that their mothers, the captains, the scholars, the princes and the Pope are rolling with it.

ANDREA. That turning-round business is no good. I can see with my own eyes that the sun comes up in one place in the morning and goes down in a different place in the evening. It doesn't stand still, I can see it move.

GALILEO. You see nothing, all you do is gawk. Gawking is not seeing. [*He puts the iron washstand in the middle of the room.*] Now: that's the sun. Sit down. [ANDREA sits on a chair. GALILEO stands behind him.] Where is the sun, on your right or on your left?

ANDREA. Left.

GALILEO. And how will it get to the right?

ANDREA. By your putting it there, of course.

GALILEO. Of course? [*He picks ANDREA up, chair and all, and carries him round to the other side of the washstand.*] Now where is the sun?

ANDREA. On the right.

GALILEO. And did it move?

ANDREA. I did.

GALILEO. Wrong. Stupid! The chair moved.

ANDREA. But I was on it.

GALILEO. Of course. The chair is the earth, and you're sitting on it.

[MRS. SARTI, *who has come in with a glass of milk and a roll, has been watching.*]

MRS. SARTI. What are you doing with my son, Mr. Galilei?

ANDREA. Now, mother, you don't understand.

MRS. SARTI. You understand, don't you? Last night he tried to tell me that the earth goes round the sun. You'll soon have him saying that two times two is five.

GALILEO [*eating his breakfast*]. Apparently we are on the threshold of a new era, Mrs. Sarti.

MRS. SARTI. Well, I hope we can pay the milkman in this new era. A young gentleman is here to take private lessons and he is well-dressed and don't you frighten him away like you did the others. Wasting your time with Andrea! [*To ANDREA.*] How many times have I told you not to wheedle free lessons out of Mr. Galilei? [MRS. SARTI *goes.*]

GALILEO. So you thought enough of the turning-round-business to tell your mother about it.

ANDREA. Just to surprise her.

GALILEO. Andrea, I wouldn't talk about our ideas outside.

ANDREA. Why not?

GALILEO. Certain of the authorities won't like it.

ANDREA. Why not, if it's the truth?

GALILEO [*laughs*]. Because we are like the worms who are little and have dim eyes and can hardly see the stars at all, and the new astronomy is a framework of guesses or very little more—yet.

[MRS. SARTI *shows in* LUDOVICO MARSILI, *a presentable young man.*]

GALILEO. This house is like a marketplace. [*Pointing to the model.*] Move that out of the way! Put it down there!

[LUDOVICO *does.*]

LUDOVICO. Good morning, sir. My name is Ludovico Marsili.

GALILEO [*reading a letter of recommendation he has brought*]. You came by way of Holland and your family lives in the Campagna? Private lessons, thirty scudi a month.

LUDOVICO. That's all right, of course, sir.

GALILEO. What is your subject?

LUDOVICO. Horses.

GALILEO. Aha.

LUDOVICO. I don't understand science, sir.

GALILEO. Aha.

LUDOVICO. They showed me an instrument like that in Amsterdam. You'll pardon me, sir, but it didn't make sense to me at all.

GALILEO. It's out of date now.

[ANDREA *goes.*]

LUDOVICO. You'll have to be patient with me, sir. Nothing in science makes sense to me.

GALILEO. Aha.

LUDOVICO. I saw a brand new instrument in Amsterdam. A tube affair. "See things five times as large as life!" It had two lenses, one at each end, one

lens bulged and the other was like that. [*Gesture.*] Any normal person would think that different lenses cancel each other out. They didn't! I just stood and looked a fool.

GALILEO. I don't quite follow you. What does one see enlarged?

LUDOVICO. Church steeples, pigeons, boats. Anything at a distance.

GALILEO. Did you yourself—see things enlarged?

LUDOVICO. Yes, sir.

GALILEO. And the tube had two lenses? Was it like this? [*He has been making a sketch.*]

[LUDOVICO *nods.*]

GALILEO. A recent invention?

LUDOVICO. It must be. They only started peddling it on the streets a few days before I left Holland.

GALILEO [*starts to scribble calculations on the sketch; almost friendly*]. Why do you bother your head with science? Why don't you just breed horses?

[*Enter MRS. SARTI. GALILEO doesn't see her. She listens to the following.*]

LUDOVICO. My mother is set on the idea that science is necessary nowadays for conversation.

GALILEO. Aha. You'll find Latin or philosophy easier. [*MRS. SARTI catches his eye.*] I'll see you on Tuesday afternoon.

LUDOVICO. I shall look forward to it, sir.

GALILEO. Good morning. [*He goes to the window and shouts into the street.*] Andrea! Hey, Redhead, Redhead!

MRS. SARTI. The curator of the museum is here to see you.

GALILEO. Don't look at me like that. I took him, didn't I?

MRS. SARTI. I caught your eye in time.

GALILEO. Show the curator in.

[*She goes. He scribbles something on a new sheet of paper. THE CURATOR comes in.*]

CURATOR. Good morning, Mr. Galilei.

GALILEO. Lend me a scudo. [*He takes it and goes to the window, wrapping the coin in the paper on which he has been scribbling.*] Redhead, run to the spectacle-maker and bring me two lenses; here are the measurements. [*He throws the paper out of the window. During the following scene GALILEO studies his sketch of the lenses.*]

CURATOR. Mr. Galilei, I have come to return your petition for an honorarium. Unfortunately I am unable to recommend your request.

GALILEO. My good sir, how can I make ends meet on five hundred scudi?

CURATOR. What about your private students?

GALILEO. If I spend all my time with students, when am I to study? My particular science is on the threshold of important discoveries. [*He throws a manuscript on the table.*] Here are my findings on the laws of falling bodies. That should be worth 200 scudi.

CURATOR. I am sure that any paper of yours is of infinite worth, Mr. Galilei. . . .

GALILEO. I was limiting it to 200 scudi.

CURATOR [*cool*]. Mr. Galilei, if you want money and leisure, go to Florence.² I have no doubt Prince Cosmo de Medici will be glad to subsidize

² Italy in the seventeenth century was an assemblage of city-states, some of them republics and some ruled by princes.

you, but eventually you will be forbidden to think—in the name of the Inquisition. [GALILEO says *nothing*.] Now let us not make a mountain out of a mole-hill. You are happy here in the Republic of Venice but you need money. Well, that's human, Mr. Galilei, may I suggest a simple solution? You remember that chart you made for the army to extract cube roots without any knowledge of mathematics? Now that was practical!

GALILEO. Bosh!

CURATOR. Don't say bosh about something that astounded the Chamber of Commerce. Our city elders are businessmen. Why don't you invent something useful that will bring them a little profit?

GALILEO [*playing with the sketch of the lenses; suddenly*]. I see. Mr. Priuli, I may have something for you.

CURATOR. You don't say so.

GALILEO. It's not quite there yet, but . . .

CURATOR. You've never let me down yet, Galilei.

GALILEO. You are always an inspiration to me, Priuli.

CURATOR. You are a great man: a discontented man, but I've always said you are a great man.

GALILEO [*tartly*]. My discontent, Priuli, is for the most part with myself. I am forty-six years of age and have achieved nothing which satisfies me.

CURATOR. I won't disturb you any further.

GALILEO. Thank you. Good morning.

CURATOR. Good morning. And thank you.

[*He goes. GALILEO sighs. ANDREA returns, bringing lenses.*]

ANDREA. One scudo was not enough. I had to leave my cap with him before he'd let me take them away.

GALILEO. We'll get it back some day. Give them to me. [*He takes the lenses over to the window, holding them in the relation they would have in a telescope.*]

ANDREA. What are those for?

GALILEO. Something for the senate. With any luck, they will rake in 200 scudi. Take a look!

ANDREA. My, things look close! I can read the copper letters on the bell in the Campanile. And the washerwomen by the river, I can see their washboards!

GALILEO. Get out of the way. [*Looking through the lenses himself.*] Aha!

SCENE II

*No one's virtue is complete:
Great Galileo liked to eat.
You will not resent, we hope,
The truth about his telescope.*

The great arsenal of Venice, overlooking the harbor full of ships. SENATORS and OFFICIALS on one side, GALILEO, his daughter VIRGINIA and his friend SAGREDO, on the other side. They are dressed in formal, festive clothes. VIRGINIA is fourteen and charming. She carries a velvet cushion on which lies a brand new telescope. Behind GALILEO are some ARTISANS from the arsenal. There are onlookers, LUDOVICO amongst them.

CURATOR [*announcing*]. Senators, Artisans of the Great Arsenal of Venice; Mr. Galileo Galilei, professor of mathematics at your University of Padua.

[*GALILEO steps forward and starts to speak.*]

GALILEO. Members of the High Senate! Gentlemen: I have great pleasure, as director of this institute, in presenting for your approval and acceptance an entirely new instrument originating from this our great arsenal of the Republic of Venice. As professor of mathematics at your University of Padua, your obedient servant has always counted it his privilege to offer you such discoveries and inventions as might prove lucrative to the manufacturers and merchants of our Venetian Republic. Thus, in all humility, I tender you this, my optical tube, or telescope, constructed, I assure you, on the most scientific and Christian principles, the product of seventeen years patient research at your University of Padua.

[*GALILEO steps back. The SENATORS applaud.*]

SAGREDO [*aside to GALILEO*]. Now you will be able to pay your bills.

GALILEO. Yes. It will make money for them. But you realize that it is more than a money-making gadget?—I turned it on the moon last night . . .

CURATOR [*in his best chamber-of-commerce manner*]. Gentlemen: Our Republic is to be congratulated not only because this new acquisition will be one more feather in the cap of Venetian culture . . . [*Polite applause.*] . . . not only because our own Mr. Galilei has generously handed this fresh product of his teeming brain entirely over to you, allowing you to manufacture as many of these highly saleable articles as you please . . . [*Considerable applause.*] But Gentlemen of the Senate, has it occurred to you that—with the help of this remarkable new instrument—the battlefleet of the enemy will be visible to us a full two hours before we are visible to him? [*Tremendous applause.*]

GALILEO [*aside to SAGREDO*]. We have been held up three generations for lack of a thing like this. I want to go home.

SAGREDO. What about the moon?

GALILEO. Well, for one thing, it doesn't give off its own light.

CURATOR [*continuing his oration*]. And now, Your Excellency, and Members of the Senate, Mr. Galilei entreats you to accept the instrument from the hands of his charming daughter Virginia.

[*Polite applause. He beckons to VIRGINIA, who steps forward and presents the telescope to the DOGE.*]

CURATOR [*during this*]. Mr. Galilei gives his invention entirely into your hands, Gentlemen, enjoining you to construct as many of these instruments as you may please.

[*More applause. The SENATORS gather round the telescope, examining it, and looking through it.*]

GALILEO [*aside to SAGREDO*]. Do you know what the Milky Way is made of?

SAGREDO. No.

GALILEO. I do.

CURATOR [*interrupting*]. Congratulations, Mr. Galilei. Your extra five hundred scudi a year are safe.

GALILEO. Pardon? What? Of course, the five hundred scudi! Yes!

[*A prosperous man is standing beside the CURATOR.*]

CURATOR. Mr. Galilei, Mr. Matti of Florence.

MATTI. You're opening new fields, Mr. Galilei. We could do with you at Florence.

CURATOR. Now, Mr. Matti, leave something to us poor Venetians.

MATTI. It is a pity that a great republic has to seek an excuse to pay its great men their right and proper dues.

CURATOR. Even a great man has to have an incentive. [*He joins the SENATORS at the telescope.*]

MATTI. I am an iron founder.

GALILEO. Iron founder!

MATTI. With factories at Pisa and Florence. I wanted to talk to you about a machine you designed for a friend of mine in Padua.

GALILEO. I'll put you on to someone to copy it for you, I am not going to have the time.—How are things in Florence?

[*They wander away.*]

FIRST SENATOR [*peering*]. Extraordinary! They're having their lunch on that frigate. Lobsters! I'm hungry!

[*Laughter.*]

SECOND SENATOR. Oh, good heavens, look at her! I must tell my wife to stop bathing on the roof. When can I buy one of these things?

[*Laughter.* VIRGINIA has spotted LUDOVICO among the onlookers and drags him to GALILEO.]

VIRGINIA [*to LUDOVICO*]. Did I do it nicely?

LUDOVICO. I thought so.

VIRGINIA. Here's Ludovico to congratulate you, father.

LUDOVICO [*embarrassed*]. Congratulations, sir.

GALILEO. I improved it.

LUDOVICO. Yes, sir. I am beginning to understand science.

[*GALILEO is surrounded.*]

VIRGINIA. Isn't father a great man?

LUDOVICO. Yes.

VIRGINIA. Isn't that new thing father made pretty?

LUDOVICO. Yes, a pretty red. Where I saw it first it was covered in green.

VIRGINIA. What was?

LUDOVICO. Never mind. [*A short pause.*] Have you ever been to Holland?

[*They go. All Venice is congratulating GALILEO, who wants to go home.*]

SCENE III

*January ten, sixteen ten:
Galileo Galilei abolishes heaven.*

GALILEO's study at Padua. It is night. GALILEO and SAGREDO at a telescope.

SAGREDO [*softly*]. The edge of the crescent is jagged. All along the dark part, near the shiny crescent, bright particles of light keep coming up, one after the other and growing larger and merging with the bright crescent.

GALILEO. How do you explain those spots of light?

SAGREDO. It can't be true . . .

GALILEO. It is true: they are high mountains.

SAGREDO. On a star?

GALILEO. Yes. The shining particles are mountain peaks catching the first rays of the rising sun while the slopes of the mountains are still dark, and what you see is the sunlight moving down from the peaks into the valleys.

SAGREDO. But this gives the lie to all the astronomy that's been taught for the last two thousand years.

GALILEO. Yes. What you are seeing now has been seen by no other man beside myself.

SAGREDO. But the moon can't be an earth with mountains and valleys like our own any more than the earth can be a star.

GALILEO. The moon is an earth with mountains and valleys,—and the earth is a star. As the moon appears to us, so we appear to the moon. From the moon, the earth looks something like a crescent, sometimes like a half-globe, sometimes a full-globe, and sometimes it is not visible at all.

SAGREDO. Galileo, this is frightening.

[*An urgent knocking on the door.*]

GALILEO. I've discovered something else, something even more astonishing.

[*More knocking. GALILEO opens the door and the CURATOR comes in.*]

CURATOR. There it is—your “miraculous optical tube.” Do you know that this invention he so picturesquely termed “the fruit of seventeen years research” will be on sale tomorrow for two scudi apiece at every street corner in Venice? A shipload of them has just arrived from Holland.

SAGREDO. Oh, dear!

[*GALILEO turns his back and adjusts the telescope.*]

CURATOR. When I think of the poor gentlemen of the senate who believed they were getting an invention they could monopolize for their own profit. . . . Why, when they took their first look through the glass, it was only by the merest chance that they didn't see a peddler, seven times enlarged, selling tubes exactly like it at the corner of the street.

SAGREDO. Mr. Priuli, with the help of this instrument, Mr. Galilei has made discoveries that will revolutionize our concept of the universe.

CURATOR. Mr. Galilei provided the city with a first rate water pump and the irrigation works he designed function splendidly. How was I to expect this?

GALILEO [*still at the telescope*]. Not so fast, Priuli. I may be on the track of a very large gadget. Certain of the stars appear to have regular movements. If there were a clock in the sky, it could be seen from anywhere. That might be useful for your shipowners.

CURATOR. I won't listen to you. I listened to you before, and as a reward for my friendship you have made me the laughingstock of the town. You can laugh—you got your money. But let me tell you this: you've destroyed my faith in a lot of things, Mr. Galilei. I'm disgusted with the world. That's all I have to say. [*He storms out.*]

GALILEO [*embarrassed*]. Businessmen bore me, they suffer so. Did you see the frightened look in his eyes when he caught sight of a world not created solely for the purpose of doing business?

SAGREDO. Did you know that telescopes had been made in Holland?

GALILEO. I'd heard about it. But the one I made for the Senators was twice as good as any Dutchman's. Besides, I needed the money. How can I work, with

the tax collector on the doorstep? And my poor daughter will never acquire a husband unless she has a dowry, she's not too bright. And I like to buy books—all kinds of books. Why not? And what about my appetite? I don't think well unless I eat well. Can I help it if I get my best ideas over a good meal and a bottle of wine? They don't pay me as much as they pay the butcher's boy. If only I could have five years to do nothing but research! Come on. I am going to show you something else.

SAGREDO. I don't know that I want to look again.

GALILEO. This is one of the brighter nebulae of the Milky Way. What do you see?

SAGREDO. But it's made up of stars—countless stars.

GALILEO. Countless worlds.

SAGREDO [*hesitating*]. What about the theory that the earth revolves round the sun? Have you run across anything about that?

GALILEO. No. But I noticed something on Tuesday that might prove a step towards even that. Where's Jupiter? There are four lesser stars near Jupiter. I happened on them on Monday but didn't take any particular note of their position. On Tuesday I looked again. I could have sworn they had moved. They have changed again. Tell me what you see.

SAGREDO. I only see three.

GALILEO. Where's the fourth? Let's get the charts and settle down to work. [*They work and the lights dim. The lights go up again. It is near dawn.*]

GALILEO. The only place the fourth can be is round at the back of the larger star where we cannot see it. This means there are small stars revolving around a big star. Where are the crystal shells now that the stars are supposed to be fixed to?

SAGREDO. Jupiter can't be attached to anything: there are other stars revolving round it.

GALILEO. There is no support in the heavens. [SAGREDO *laughs awkwardly*.] Don't stand there looking at me as if it weren't true.

SAGREDO. I suppose it is true. I'm afraid.

GALILEO. Why?

SAGREDO. What do you think is going to happen to you for saying that there is another sun around which other earths revolve? And that there are only stars and no difference between earth and heaven? Where is God then?

GALILEO. What do you mean?

SAGREDO. God? Where is God?

GALILEO [*angrily*]. Not there! Any more than he'd be here—if creatures from the moon came down to look for him!

SAGREDO. Then where is He?

GALILEO. I'm not a theologian: I'm a mathematician.

SAGREDO. You are a human being! [*Almost shouting*.] Where is God in your system of the universe?

GALILEO. Within ourselves. Or—nowhere.

SAGREDO. Ten years ago a man was burned at the stake for saying that.

GALILEO. Giordano Bruno was an idiot: he spoke too soon. He would never have been condemned if he could have backed up what he said with proof.

SAGREDO [*incredulously*]. Do you really believe proof will make any difference?

GALILEO. I believe in the human race. The only people that can't be reasoned with are the dead. Human beings are intelligent.

SAGREDO. Intelligent—or merely shrewd?

GALILEO. I know they call a donkey a horse when they want to sell it, and a horse a donkey when they want to buy it. But is that the whole story? Aren't they susceptible to truth as well? [*He fishes a small pebble out of his pocket.*] If anybody were to drop a stone . . . [*Drops the pebble.*] . . . and tell them that it didn't fall, do you think they would keep quiet? The evidence of your own eyes is a very seductive thing. Sooner or later everybody must succumb to it.

SAGREDO. Galileo, I am helpless when you talk.

[*A church bell has been ringing for some time, calling people to mass. Enter VIRGINIA, muffled up for mass, carrying a candle protected from the wind by a globe.*]

VIRGINIA. Oh, father, you promised to go to bed tonight, and it's five o'clock again.

GALILEO. Why are you up at this hour?

VIRGINIA. I'm going to mass with Mrs. Sarti. Ludovico is going too. How was the night, father?

GALILEO. Bright.

VIRGINIA. What did you find through the tube?

GALILEO. Only some little specks by the side of a star. I must draw attention to them somehow. I think I'll name them after the Prince of Florence. Why not call them the Medicean planets? By the way, we may move to Florence. I've written to His Highness, asking if he can use me as Court Mathematician.

VIRGINIA. Oh, father, we'll be at the court!

SAGREDO [*amazed*]. Galileo!

GALILEO. My dear Sagredo, I must have leisure. My only worry is that His Highness after all may not take me. I'm not accustomed to writing formal letters to great personages. Here, do you think this is the right sort of thing?

SAGREDO [*reads and quotes*]. "Whose sole desire is to reside in Your Highness' presence—the rising sun of our great age." Cosmo de Medici is a boy of nine.

GALILEO. The only way a man like me can land a good job is by crawling on his stomach. Your father, my dear, is going to take his share of the pleasures of life in exchange for all his hard work, and about time too. I have no patience, Sagredo, with a man who doesn't use his brains to fill his belly. Run along to mass now.

[*VIRGINIA goes.*]

SAGREDO. Galileo, do not go to Florence.

GALILEO. Why not?

SAGREDO. The monks are in power there.

GALILEO. Going to mass is a small price to pay for a full belly. And there are many famous scholars at the court of Florence.

SAGREDO. Court monkeys.

GALILEO. I shall enjoy taking them by the scruff of the neck and making them look through the telescope.

SAGREDO. Galileo, you are traveling the road to disaster. You are suspicious

and skeptical in science, but in politics you are as naive as your daughter! How can people in power leave a man at large who tells the truth, even if it be the truth about the distant stars? Can you see the Pope scribbling a note in his diary: "10th of January, 1610, Heaven abolished?" A moment ago when you were at the telescope, I saw you tied to the stake, and when you said you believed in proof, I smelt burning flesh!

GALILEO. I am going to Florence.

[*Before the next scene a curtain with the following legend on it is lowered*]

By setting the name of Medici in the sky, I am bestowing immortality upon the stars. I commend myself to you as your most faithful and devoted servant, whose sole desire is to reside in Your Highness' presence, the rising sun of our great age.

GALILEO GALILEI

SCENE IV

GALILEO's house at Florence. Well-appointed. GALILEO is demonstrating his telescope to PRINCE COSMO DE MEDICI, a boy of nine, accompanied by his LORD CHAMBERLAIN, LADIES and GENTLEMEN of the Court and an assortment of university PROFESSORS. With GALILEO are ANDREA and FEDERZONI, the new assistant (an old man). MRS. SARTI stands by. Before the scene opens the voice of the PHILOSOPHER can be heard.

VOICE OF THE PHILOSOPHER. Quaedam miracula universi. Orbes mystice canorae, arcus crystallini, circulatio corporum coelestium. Cyclorum epicyclorumque intoxicatio, integritas tabulae chordarum et architectura elata globorum coelestium.

GALILEO. Shall we speak in everyday language? My colleague Mr. Federzoni does not understand Latin.

PHILOSOPHER. Is it necessary that he should?

GALILEO. Yes.

PHILOSOPHER. Forgive me. I thought he was your mechanic.

ANDREA. Mr. Federzoni is a mechanic and a scholar.

PHILOSOPHER. Thank you, young man. If Mr. Federzoni insists . . .

GALILEO. I insist.

PHILOSOPHER. It will not be as clear, but it's your house. Your Highness . . . [THE PRINCE is ineffectually trying to establish contact with ANDREA.] I was about to recall to Mr. Galilei some of the wonders of the universe as they are set down for us in the Divine Classics. [THE LADIES "ah."] Remind him of the "mystically musical spheres, the crystal arches, the circulation of the heavenly bodies—"

ELDERLY LADY. Perfect poise!

PHILOSOPHER. "—the intoxication of the cycles and epicycles, the integrity of the tables of chords and the enraptured architecture of the celestial globes."

ELDERLY LADY. What diction!

PHILOSOPHER. May I pose the question: Why should we go out of our way to look for things that can only strike a discord in this ineffable harmony?

[*The LADIES applaud.*]

FEDERZONI. Take a look through here—you'll be interested.

ANDREA. Sit down here, please.

[*The PROFESSORS laugh.*]

MATHEMATICIAN. Mr. Galilei, nobody doubts that your brain child—or is it your adopted brain child?—is brilliantly contrived.

GALILEO. Your Highness, one can see the four stars as large as life, you know.

[*The PRINCE looks to the ELDERLY LADY for guidance.*]

MATHEMATICIAN. Ah. But has it occurred to you that an eyeglass through which one sees such phenomena might not be a too reliable eyeglass?

GALILEO. How is that?

MATHEMATICIAN. If one could be sure you would keep your temper, Mr. Galilei, I could suggest that what one sees in the eyeglass and what is in the heavens are two entirely different things.

GALILEO [*quietly*]. You are suggesting fraud?

MATHEMATICIAN. No! How could I, in the presence of His Highness?

ELDERLY LADY. The gentlemen are just wondering if Your Highness' stars are really, really there!

[*Pause.*]

YOUNG LADY [*trying to be helpful*]. Can one see the claws on the Great Bear?

GALILEO. And everything on Taurus the Bull.

FEDERZONI. Are you going to look through it or not?

MATHEMATICIAN. With the greatest of pleasure.

[*Pause. Nobody goes near the telescope. All of a sudden the boy ANDREA turns and marches pale and erect past them through the whole length of the room. The GUESTS follow with their eyes.*]

MRS. SARTI [*as he passes her*]. What is the matter with you?

ANDREA [*shocked*]. They are wicked.

PHILOSOPHER. Your Highness, it is a delicate matter and I had no intention of bringing it up, but Mr. Galilei was about to demonstrate the impossible. His new stars would have broken the outer crystal sphere—which we know of on the authority of Aristotle. I am sorry.

MATHEMATICIAN. The last word.

FEDERZONI. He had no telescope.

MATHEMATICIAN. Quite.

GALILEO [*keeping his temper*]. "Truth is the daughter of Time, not of Authority." Gentlemen, the sum of our knowledge is pitiful. It has been my singular good fortune to find a new instrument which brings a small patch of the universe a little bit closer. It is at your disposal.

PHILOSOPHER. Where is all this leading?

GALILEO. Are we, as scholars, concerned with where the truth might lead us?

PHILOSOPHER. Mr. Galilei, the truth might lead us anywhere!

GALILEO. I can only beg you to look through my eyeglass.

MATHEMATICIAN [*wild*]. If I understand Mr. Galilei correctly, he is asking us to discard the teachings of two thousand years.

GALILEO. For two thousand years we have been looking at the sky and didn't see the four moons of Jupiter, and there they were all the time. Why defend shaken teachings? You should be doing the shaking. [*The PRINCE is sleepy.*] Your Highness! My work in the Great Arsenal of Venice brought me in daily contact with sailors, carpenters, and so on. These men are unread. They depend on the evidence of their senses. But they taught me many new ways of doing things. The question is whether these gentlemen here want to be found out as fools by men who might not have had the advantages of a classical education but who are not afraid to use their eyes. I tell you that our dockyards are stirring with that same high curiosity which was the true glory of Ancient Greece.

[*Pause.*]

PHILOSOPHER. I have no doubt Mr. Galilei's theories will arouse the enthusiasm of the dockyards.

CHAMBERLAIN. Your Highness, I find to my amazement that this highly informative discussion has exceeded the time we had allowed for it. May I remind Your Highness that the State Ball begins in three-quarters of an hour? [*The COURT bows low.*]

ELDERLY LADY. We would really have liked to look through your eyeglass, Mr. Galilei, wouldn't we, Your Highness?

[*The PRINCE bows politely and is led to the door. GALILEO follows the PRINCE, CHAMBERLAIN and LADIES towards the exit. The PROFESSORS remain at the telescope.*]

GALILEO [*almost servile*]. All anybody has to do is look through the telescope, Your Highness.

[*MRS. SARTI takes a plate with candies to the PRINCE as he is walking out.*]

MRS. SARTI. A piece of homemade candy, Your Highness?

ELDERLY LADY. Not now. Thank you. It is too soon before His Highness' supper.

PHILOSOPHER. Wouldn't I like to take that thing to pieces.

MATHEMATICIAN. Ingenious contraption. It must be quite difficult to keep clean. [*He rubs the lens with his handkerchief and looks at the handkerchief.*]

FEDERZONI. We did not paint the Medicean stars on the lens.

ELDERLY LADY [*to the PRINCE, who has whispered something to her*]. No, no, no, there is nothing the matter with your stars!

CHAMBERLAIN [*across the stage to GALILEO*]. His Highness will of course seek the opinion of the greatest living authority: Christopher Clavius, Chief Astronomer to the Papal College in Rome.

SCENE V

*Things take indeed a wondrous turn
When learned men do stoop to learn.
Clavius, we are pleased to say,
Upheld Galileo Galilei.*

A burst of laughter is heard and the curtains reveal a hall in the Collegium Romanum. HIGH CHURCHMEN, MONKS and SCHOLARS standing about talking and laughing. GALILEO by himself in a corner.

FAT PRELATE [*shaking with laughter*]. Hopeless! Hopeless! Hopeless! Will you tell me something people won't believe?

A SCHOLAR. Yes, that you don't love your stomach!

FAT PRELATE. They'd believe that. They only do not believe what's good for them. They doubt the devil, but fill them up with some fiddle-de-dee about the earth rolling like a marble in the gutter and they swallow it hook, line, and sinker. Sancta simplicitas!

[*He laughs until the tears run down his cheeks. The others laugh with him. A group has formed whose members boisterously begin to pretend they are standing on a rolling globe.*]

A MONK. It's rolling fast, I'm dizzy. May I hold on to you, Professor?

[*He sways dizzily and clings to one of the scholars for support.*]

THE SCHOLAR. Old Mother Earth's been at the bottle again. Whoa!

MONK. Hey! Hey! We're slipping off! Help!

SECOND SCHOLAR. Look! There's Venus! Hold me, lads. Whee!

SECOND MONK. Don't, don't hurl us off on to the moon. There are nasty sharp mountain peaks on the moon, brethren!

VARIOUSLY. Hold tight! Hold tight! Don't look down! Hold tight! It'll make you giddy!

FAT PRELATE. And we cannot have giddy people in Holy Rome.

[*They rock with laughter. An INFURIATED MONK comes out from a large door at the rear holding a bible in his hand and pointing out a page with his finger.*]

INFURIATED MONK. What does the bible say—"Sun, stand thou still on Gideon and thou, moon, in the valley of Ajalon."³ Can the sun come to a standstill if it doesn't ever move? Does the bible lie?

FAT PRELATE. How did Christopher Clavius, the greatest astronomer we have, get mixed up in an investigation of this kind?

INFURIATED MONK. He's in there with his eye glued to that diabolical instrument.

FAT PRELATE [*to GALILEO, who has been playing with his pebble and has dropped it*]. Mr. Galilei, something dropped down.

GALILEO. Monsignor, are you sure it didn't drop up?

INFURIATED MONK. As astronomers we are aware that there are phenomena which are beyond us, but man can't expect to understand everything!

[*Enter a very old CARDINAL leaning on a MONK for support. Others move aside.*]

OLD CARDINAL. Aren't they out yet? Can't they reach a decision on that paltry matter? Christopher Clavius ought to know his astronomy after all these years. I am informed that Mr. Galilei transfers mankind from the center of the universe to somewhere on the outskirts. Mr. Galilei is therefore an enemy of mankind and must be dealt with as such. Is it conceivable that God would trust this most precious fruit of His labor to a minor frolicking star? Would He have

³ Joshua 10:12.

sent His Son to such a place? How can there be people with such twisted minds that they believe what they're told by the slave of a multiplication table?

FAT PRELATE [*quietly to CARDINAL*]. The gentleman is over there.

OLD CARDINAL. So you are the man. You know my eyes are not what they were, but I can see you bear a striking resemblance to the man we burned. What was his name?

MONK. Your Eminence must avoid excitement the doctor said . . .

OLD CARDINAL [*disregarding him*]. So you have degraded the earth despite the fact that you live by her and receive everything from her. I won't have it! I won't have it! I won't be a nobody on an inconsequential star briefly twirling hither and thither. I tread the earth, and the earth is firm beneath my feet, and there is no motion to the earth, and the earth is the center of all things, and I am the center of the earth, and the eye of the creator is upon me. About me revolve, affixed to their crystal shells, the lesser lights of the stars and the great light of the sun, created to give light upon me that God might see me—Man, God's greatest effort, the center of creation. "In the image of God created He him."⁴ Immortal . . .

[*His strength fails him and he catches for the MONK for support.*]

MONK. You mustn't overtax your strength, Your Eminence.

[*At this moment the door at the rear opens and CHRISTOPHER CLAVIUS enters followed by his ASTRONOMERS. He strides hastily across the hall, looking neither right nor left. As he goes by we hear him say—*]

CLAVIUS. He is right.

[*Deadly silence. All turn to GALILEO.*]

OLD CARDINAL. What is it? Have they reached a decision?

[*No one speaks.*]

MONK. It is time that Your Eminence went home.

[*The hall is emptying fast. One little MONK who had entered with CLAVIUS speaks to GALILEO.*]

LITTLE MONK. Mr. Galilei, I heard Father Clavius say: "Now it's for the theologians to set the heavens right again." You have won.

[*Before the next scene a curtain with the following legend on it is lowered:*]

. . . As these new astronomical charts enable us to determine longitudes at sea and so make it possible to reach the new continents by the shortest routes, we would beseech Your Excellency to aid us in reaching Mr. Galilei, mathematician to the Court of Florence, who is now in Rome . . .

—FROM A LETTER WRITTEN BY A MEMBER
OF THE GENOA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE
AND NAVIGATION TO THE PAPAL LEGATION

SCENE VI

*When Galileo was in Rome
A Cardinal asked him to his home
He wined and dined him as his guest
And only made one small request.*

⁴ Genesis 1:27.

CARDINAL BELLARMIN's house in Rome. Music is heard and the chatter of many guests. Two SECRETARIES are at the rear of the stage at a desk. GALILEO, his daughter VIRGINIA, now 21, and LUDOVICO MARSILI, who has become her fiancé, are just arriving. A few GUESTS, standing near the entrance with masks in their hands, nudge each other and are suddenly silent. GALILEO looks at them. They applaud him politely and bow.

VIRGINIA. O father! I'm so happy. I won't dance with anyone but you, Ludovico.

GALILEO [*to a SECRETARY*]. I was to wait here for His Eminence.

FIRST SECRETARY. His Eminence will be with you in a few minutes.

VIRGINIA. Do I look proper?

LUDOVICO. You are showing some lace.

[GALILEO puts his arms around their shoulders.]

GALILEO [*quoting mischievously*].

Fret not, daughter, if perchance
You attract a wanton glance.
The eyes that catch a trembling lace
Will guess the heartbeat's quickened pace.
Lovely woman still may be
Careless with felicity.

VIRGINIA [*to GALILEO*]. Feel my heart.

GALILEO [*to LUDOVICO*]. It's thumping.

VIRGINIA. I hope I always say the right thing.

LUDOVICO. She's afraid she's going to let us down.

VIRGINIA. Oh, I want to look beautiful.

GALILEO. You'd better. If you don't they'll start saying all over again that the earth doesn't turn.

LUDOVICO [*laughing*]. It *doesn't* turn, sir.

[GALILEO laughs.]

GALILEO. Go and enjoy yourselves. [*He speaks to one of the SECRETARIES.*]
A large fête?

FIRST SECRETARY. Two hundred and fifty guests, Mr. Galilei. We have represented here this evening most of the great families of Italy, the Orsinis, the Villanis, the Nuccolis, the Soldanieris, the Canes, the Lecchis, the Estensis, the Colombinis, the . . .

[VIRGINIA comes running back.]

VIRGINIA. Oh father, I didn't tell you: you're famous.

GALILEO. Why?

VIRGINIA. The hairdresser in the Via Vittorio kept four other ladies waiting and took me first. [*Exit.*]

GALILEO [*at the stairway, leaning over the well*]. Rome!

[*Enter* CARDINAL BELLARMIN, wearing the mask of a lamb, and CARDINAL BARBERINI, wearing the mask of a dove.]

SECRETARIES. Their Eminences, Cardinals Bellarmin and Barberini.

[*The CARDINALS lower their masks.*]

GALILEO [*to BELLARMIN*]. Your Eminence.

BELLARMIN. Mr. Galilei, Cardinal Barberini.

GALILEO. Your Eminence.

BARBERINI. So you are the father of that lovely child!

BELLARMIN. Who is inordinately proud of being her father's daughter.

[*They laugh.*]

BARBERINI [*points his finger at GALILEO*]. "The sun riseth and setteth and returneth to its place,"⁵ saith the bible. What saith Galilei?

GALILEO. Appearances are notoriously deceptive, Your Eminence. Once when I was so high, I was standing on a ship that was pulling away from the shore and I shouted, "The shore is moving!" I know now that it was the ship which was moving.

BARBERINI [*laughs*]. You can't catch that man. I tell you, Bellarmin, his moons around Jupiter are hard nuts to crack. Unfortunately for me I happened to glance at a few papers on astronomy once. It is harder to get rid of than the itch.

BELLARMIN. Let's move with the times. If it makes navigation easier for sailors to use new charts based on a new hypothesis let them have them. We only have to scotch doctrines that contradict Holy Writ.

[*He leans over the balustrade of the well and acknowledges various GUESTS.*]

BARBERINI. But Bellarmin, you haven't caught on to this fellow. The scriptures don't satisfy him. Copernicus⁶ does.

GALILEO. Copernicus? "He that withholdeth corn the people shall curse him."⁷ Book of Proverbs.

BARBERINI. "A prudent man concealeth knowledge."⁸ Also Book of Proverbs.

GALILEO. "Where no oxen are, the stable is clean, but much increase is by the strength of the ox."⁹

BARBERINI. "He that ruleth his spirit is better than he that taketh a city."¹⁰

GALILEO. "But a broken spirit drieth up the bones."¹¹ [*Pause.*] "Doth not wisdom cry?"¹²

BARBERINI. "Can one walk on hot coals and his feet not be scorched?"¹³—Welcome to Rome, Friend Galileo. You recall the legend of our city's origin?¹⁴ Two small boys found sustenance and refuge with a she-wolf and from that day we have paid the price for the she-wolf's milk. But the place is not bad. We have everything for your pleasure—from a scholarly dispute with Bellarmin to

⁵ Ecclesiastes 1:5.

⁶ Copernicus (1473–1543) had held that the sun was the center of the universe to which the earth belonged and that the earth revolved about it, but it remained for Galileo and other scientists of the seventeenth century to prove the Copernican theory.

⁷ Proverbs 11:26.

⁸ Proverbs 12:23.

⁹ Proverbs 14:4.

¹⁰ Proverbs 16:32.

¹¹ Proverbs 17:22.

¹² Proverbs 8:1.

¹³ Proverbs 6:28.

¹⁴ The legend relates that the twins, Romulus and Remus, were sons of Mars and the daughter of a king and that they were cast out by the usurper of their grandfather's throne. A she-wolf suckled them, and a shepherd reared them. When grown, they restored their grandfather's throne and founded the new city, Rome, for themselves. They quarreled, however, and Remus was slain by his brother.

ladies of high degree. Look at that woman flaunting herself. No? He wants a weighty discussion! All right! [*To GALILEO.*] You people speak in terms of circles and ellipses and regular velocities—simple movements that the human mind can grasp—very convenient—but suppose Almighty God had taken it into his head to make the stars move like that . . . [*He describes an irregular motion with his fingers through the air.*] . . . then where would you be?

GALILEO. My good man—the Almighty would have endowed us with brains like that . . . [*Repeats the movement.*] . . . so that we could grasp the movements . . . [*Repeats the movement.*] . . . like that. I believe in the brain.

BARBERINI. I consider the brain inadequate. He doesn't answer. He is too polite to tell me he considers *my* brain inadequate. What is one to do with him? Butter wouldn't melt in his mouth. All he wants to do is to prove that God made a few boners in astronomy. God didn't study his astronomy hard enough before he composed Holy Writ. [*To the SECRETARIES.*] Don't take anything down. This is a scientific discussion among friends.

BELLARMIN [*to GALILEO*]. Does it not appear more probable—even to you—that the Creator knows more about his work than the created?

GALILEO. In his blindness man is liable to misread not only the sky but also the bible.

BELLARMIN. The interpretation of the bible is a matter for the ministers of God. [*GALILEO remains silent.*] At last you are quiet. [*He gestures to the SECRETARIES. They start writing.*] Tonight the Holy Office has decided that the theory according to which the earth goes around the sun is foolish, absurd, and a heresy. I am charged, Mr. Galilei, with cautioning you to abandon these teachings. [*To the FIRST SECRETARY.*] Would you repeat that?

FIRST SECRETARY [*reading*]. "His Eminence, Cardinal Bellarmin, to the aforesaid Galilei: The Holy Office has resolved that the theory according to which the earth goes around the sun is foolish, absurd, and a heresy. I am charged, Mr. Galilei, with cautioning you to abandon these teachings."

GALILEO [*rocking on his base.*]. But the facts!

BARBERINI [*consoling*]. Your findings have been ratified by the Papal Observatory, Galilei. That should be most flattering to you . . .

BELLARMIN [*cutting in*]. The Holy Office formulated the decree without going into details.

GALILEO [*to BARBERINI*]. Do you realize, the future of all scientific research is . . .

BELLARMIN [*cutting in*]. Completely assured, Mr. Galilei. It is not given to man to know the truth: it is granted to him to seek after the truth. Science is the legitimate and beloved daughter of the Church. She must have confidence in the Church.

GALILEO [*infuriated*]. I would not try confidence by whistling her too often.

BARBERINI [*quickly*]. Be careful what you're doing—you'll be throwing out the baby with the bath water, friend Galilei. [*Serious.*] We need you more than you need us.

BELLARMIN. Well, it is time we introduced our distinguished friend to our guests. The whole country talks of him!

BARBERINI. Let us replace our masks, Bellarmin. Poor Galilei hasn't got one.

[*He laughs. They take GALILEO out.*]

FIRST SECRETARY. Did you get his last sentence?

SECOND SECRETARY. Yes. Do you have what he said about believing in the brain?

[*Another cardinal—the INQUISITOR—enters.*]

INQUISITOR. Did the conference take place?

[*The FIRST SECRETARY hands him the papers and the INQUISITOR dismisses the SECRETARIES. They go. The INQUISITOR sits down and starts to read the transcription. Two or three YOUNG LADIES skitter across the stage; they see the INQUISITOR and curtsy as they go.*]

YOUNG GIRL. Who was that?

HER FRIEND. The Cardinal Inquisitor.

[*They giggle and go. Enter VIRGINIA. She curtsies as she goes. The INQUISITOR stops her.*]

INQUISITOR. Good evening, my child. Beautiful night. May I congratulate you on your betrothal? Your young man comes from a fine family. Are you staying with us here in Rome?

VIRGINIA. Not now, Your Eminence. I must go home to prepare for the wedding.

INQUISITOR. Ah. You are accompanying your father to Florence. That should please him. Science must be cold comfort in a home. Your youth and warmth will keep him down to earth. It is easy to get lost up there. [*He gestures to the sky.*]

VIRGINIA. He doesn't talk to me about the stars, Your Eminence.

INQUISITOR. No. [*He laughs.*] They don't eat fish in the fisherman's house. I can tell you something about astronomy. My child, it seems that God has blessed our modern astronomers with imaginations. It is quite alarming! Do you know that the earth—which we old fogies supposed to be so large—has shrunk to something no bigger than a walnut, and the new universe has grown so vast that prelates—and even cardinals—look like ants. Why, God Almighty might lose sight of a Pope! I wonder if I know your Father Confessor.

VIRGINIA. Father Christopherus, from Saint Ursula's at Florence, Your Eminence.

INQUISITOR. My dear child, your father will need you. Not so much now perhaps, but one of these days. You are pure, and there is strength in purity. Greatness is sometimes, indeed often, too heavy a burden for those to whom God has granted it. What man is so great that he has no place in a prayer? But I am keeping you, my dear. Your fiancé will be jealous of me, and I am afraid your father will never forgive me for holding forth on astronomy. Go to your dancing and remember me to Father Christopherus.

[*VIRGINIA kisses his ring and runs off. The INQUISITOR resumes his reading.*]

SCENE VII

*Galileo, feeling grim,
A young monk came to visit him.
The monk was born of common folk.
It was of science that they spoke.*

Garden of the Florentine AMBASSADOR in Rome. Distant hum of a great city. GALILEO and the LITTLE MONK of Scene V are talking.

GALILEO. Let's hear it. That robe you're wearing gives you the right to say whatever you want to say. Let's hear it.

LITTLE MONK. I have studied physics, Mr. Galilei.

GALILEO. That might help us if it enabled you to admit that two and two are four.

LITTLE MONK. Mr. Galilei, I have spent four sleepless nights trying to reconcile the decree that I have read with the moons of Jupiter that I have seen. This morning I decided to come to see you after I had said Mass.

GALILEO. To tell me that Jupiter has no moons?

LITTLE MONK. No, I found out that I think the decree a wise decree. It has shocked me into realizing that free research has its dangers. I have had to decide to give up astronomy. However, I felt the impulse to confide in you some of the motives which have impelled even a passionate physicist to abandon his work.

GALILEO. Your motives are familiar to me.

LITTLE MONK. You mean, of course, the special powers invested in certain commissions of the Holy Office? But there is something else. I would like to talk to you about my family. I do not come from the great city. My parents are peasants in the Campagna, who know about the cultivation of the olive tree, and not much about anything else. Too often these days when I am trying to concentrate on tracking down the moons of Jupiter, I see my parents. I see them sitting by the fire with my sister, eating their curded cheese. I see the beams of the ceiling above them, which the smoke of centuries has blackened, and I can see the veins stand out on their toil-worn hands, and the little spoons in their hands. They scrape a living, and underlying their poverty there is a sort of order. There are routines. The routine of scrubbing the floors, the routine of the seasons in the olive orchard, the routine of paying taxes. The troubles that come to them are recurrent troubles. My father did not get his poor bent back all at once, but little by little, year by year, in the olive orchard; just as year after year, with unfailing regularity, childbirth has made my mother more and more sexless. They draw the strength they need to sweat with their loaded baskets up the stony paths, to bear children, even to eat, from the sight of the trees green-ing each year anew, from the reproachful face of the soil, which is never satisfied, and from the little church and bible texts they hear there on Sunday. They have been told that God relies upon them and that the pageant of the world has been written around them that they may be tested in the important or unimportant parts handed out to them. How could they take it, were I to tell them that they are on a lump of stone ceaselessly spinning in empty space, circling around a second-rate star? What, then, would be the use of their patience, their acceptance of misery? What comfort, then, the Holy Scriptures, which have mercifully explained their crucifixion? The Holy Scriptures would then be proved full of mistakes. No, I see them begin to look frightened. I see them slowly put their spoons down on the table. They would feel cheated. "There is no eye watching over us, after all," they would say. "We have to start out on our own, at our time of life. Nobody has planned a part for us beyond this wretched one on a worthless star. There is no meaning in our misery. Hunger is

just not having eaten. It is no test of strength. Effort is just stooping and carrying. It is not a virtue." Can you understand that I read into the decree of the Holy Office a noble motherly pity and a great goodness of the soul?

GALILEO [*embarrassed*]. Hm, well at least you have found out that it is not a question of the satellites of Jupiter, but of the peasants of the Campagna! And don't try to break me down by the halo of beauty that radiates from old age. How does a pearl develop in an oyster? A jagged grain of sand makes its way into the oyster's shell and makes its life unbearable. The oyster exudes slime to cover the grain of sand and the slime eventually hardens into a pearl. The oyster nearly dies in the process. To hell with the pearl, give me the healthy oyster! And virtues are not exclusive to misery. If your parents were prosperous and happy, they might develop the virtues of happiness and prosperity. Today the virtues of exhaustion are caused by the exhausted land. For that my new water pumps could work more wonders than their ridiculous superhuman efforts. Be fruitful and multiply: for war will cut down the population, and our fields are barren! [*A pause.*] Shall I lie to your people?

LITTLE MONK. We must be silent from the highest of motives: the inward peace of less fortunate souls.

GALILEO. My dear man, as a bonus for not meddling with your parents' peace, the authorities are tendering me, on a silver platter, persecution-free, my share of the fat sweated from your parents, who, as you know, were made in God's image. Should I condone this decree, my motives might not be disinterested: easy life, no persecution and so on.

LITTLE MONK. Mr. Galilei, I am a priest.

GALILEO. You are also a physicist. How can new machinery be evolved to domesticate the river water if we physicists are forbidden to study, discuss, and pool our findings about the greatest machinery of all, the machinery of the heavenly bodies? Can I reconcile my findings on the paths of falling bodies with the current belief in the tracks of witches on broom sticks [*A pause.*] I am sorry—I shouldn't have said that.

LITTLE MONK. You don't think that the truth, if it is the truth, would make its way without us?

GALILEO. No! No! No! As much of the truth gets through as we push through. You talk about the Campagna peasants as if they were the moss on their huts. Naturally, if they don't get a move on and learn to think for themselves, the most efficient of irrigation systems cannot help them. I can see their divine patience, but where is their divine fury?

LITTLE MONK [*helpless*]. They are old!

[GALILEO stands for a moment, beaten; he cannot meet the LITTLE MONK's eyes. He takes a manuscript from the table and throws it violently on the ground.]

LITTLE MONK. What is that?

GALILEO. Here is writ what draws the ocean when it ebbs and flows. Let it lie there. Thou shalt not read. [LITTLE MONK has picked up the manuscript.] Already! An apple of the tree of knowledge, he can't wait, he wolfs it down. He will rot in hell for all eternity. Look at him, where are his manners?—Sometimes I think I would let them imprison me in a place a thousand feet beneath the earth where no light could reach me, if in exchange I could find out what stuff that is: "Light." The bad thing is that, when I find something, I have to

boast about it like a lover or a drunkard or a traitor. That is a hopeless vice and leads to the abyss. I wonder how long I shall be content to discuss it with my dog!

LITTLE MONK [*immersed in the manuscript*]. I don't understand this sentence.

GALILEO. I'll explain it to you. I'll explain it to you.
[*They are sitting on the floor.*]

SCENE VIII

*Eight long years with tongue in cheek
Of what he knew he did not speak.
Then temptation grew too great
And Galileo challenged fate.*

GALILEO's house in Florence again. GALILEO is supervising his Assistants ANDREA, FEDERZONI, and the LITTLE MONK, who are about to prepare an experiment. MRS. SARTI and VIRGINIA are at a long table sewing bridal linen. There is a new telescope, larger than the old one. At the moment it is covered with a cloth.

ANDREA [*looking up a schedule*]. Thursday. Afternoon. Floating bodies again. Ice, bowl of water, scales, and it says here an iron needle. Aristotle.

VIRGINIA. Ludovico likes to entertain. We must take care to be neat. His mother notices every stitch. She doesn't approve of father's books.

MRS. SARTI. That's all a thing of the past. He hasn't published a book for years.

VIRGINIA. That's true. Oh Sarti, it's fun sewing a trousseau.

MRS. SARTI. Virginia, I want to talk to you. You are very young, and you have no mother, and your father is putting those pieces of ice in water, and marriage is too serious a business to go into blind. Now you should go to see a real astronomer from the university and have him cast your horoscope so you know where you stand. [VIRGINIA giggles.] What's the matter?

VIRGINIA. I've been already.

MRS. SARTI. Tell Sarti.

VIRGINIA. I have to be careful for three months now because the sun is in Capricorn, but after that I get a favorable ascendant, and I can undertake a journey if I am careful of Uranus, as I'm a Scorpion.

MRS. SARTI. What about Ludovico?

VIRGINIA. He's a Leo, the astronomer said. Leos are sensual. [Giggles.]

[*There is a knock at the door, it opens. Enter the RECTOR OF THE UNIVERSITY, the philosopher of Scene IV, bringing a book.*]

RECTOR [*to VIRGINIA*]. This is about the burning issue of the moment. He may want to glance over it. My faculty would appreciate his comments. No, don't disturb him now, my dear. Every minute one takes of your father's time is stolen from Italy. [*He goes.*]

VIRGINIA. Federzoni! The rector of the university brought this.

[FEDERZONI *takes it.*]

GALILEO. What's it about?

FEDERZONI [*spelling*]. DE MACULIS IN SOLE.

ANDREA. Oh, it's on the sun spots!

[ANDREA *comes one side, and the LITTLE MONK the other, to look at the book.*]

ANDREA. A new one!

[FEDERZONI *resentfully puts the book into their hands and continues with the preparation of the experiment.*]

ANDREA. Listen to this dedication. [*Quotes.*] "To the greatest living authority on physics, Galileo Galilei."—I read Fabricius¹⁵ paper the other day. Fabricius says the spots are clusters of planets between us and the sun.

LITTLE MONK. Doubtful.

GALILEO [*noncommittal*]. Yes?

ANDREA. Paris and Prague hold that they are vapors from the sun. Federzoni doubts that.

FEDERZONI. Me? You leave me out. I said "hm," that was all. And don't discuss new things before me. I can't read the material, it's in Latin. [*He drops the scales and stands trembling with fury.*] Tell me, can I doubt anything?

[GALILEO *walks over and picks up the scales silently. Pause.*]

LITTLE MONK. There is happiness in doubting, I wonder why.

ANDREA. Aren't we going to take this up?

GALILEO. At the moment we are investigating floating bodies.

ANDREA. Mother has baskets full of letters from all over Europe asking his opinion.

FEDERZONI. The question is whether you can afford to remain silent.

GALILEO. I cannot afford to be smoked on a wood fire like a ham.

ANDREA [*surprised*]. Ah. You think the sun spots may have something to do with that again? [GALILEO *does not answer.*]

ANDREA. Well, we stick to fiddling about with bits of ice in water. That can't hurt you.

GALILEO. Correct.—Our thesis!

ANDREA. All things that are lighter than water float, and all things that are heavier sink.

GALILEO. Aristotle says—

LITTLE MONK [*reading out of a book, translating*]. "A broad and flat disk of ice, although heavier than water, still floats, because it is unable to divide the water."

GALILEO. Well. Now I push the ice below the surface. I take away the pressure of my hands. What happens?

[*Pause.*]

LITTLE MONK. It rises to the surface.

GALILEO. Correct. It seems to be able to divide the water as it's coming up, doesn't it?

LITTLE MONK. Could it be lighter than water after all?

GALILEO. Aha!

ANDREA. Then all things that are lighter than water float, and all things that are heavier sink. Q. e. d.

¹⁵ Italian anatomist and embryologist (1537–1619) who taught at Padua.

GALILEO. Not at all. Hand me that iron needle. Heavier than water? [*They all nod.*] A piece of paper. [*He places the needle on a piece of paper and floats it on the surface of the water. Pause.*] Do not be hasty with your conclusion. [*Pause.*] What happens?

FEDERZONI. The paper has sunk, the needle is floating.

VIRGINIA. What's the matter?

MRS. SARTI. Every time I hear them laugh it sends shivers down my spine. [*There is a knocking at the outer door.*]

MRS. SARTI. Who's that at the door?

[*Enter LUDOVICO. VIRGINIA runs to him. They embrace. LUDOVICO is followed by a servant with baggage.*]

MRS. SARTI. Well!

VIRGINIA. Oh! Why didn't you write that you were coming?

LUDOVICO. I decided on the spur of the moment. I was over inspecting our vineyards at Bucciole. I couldn't keep away.

GALILEO. Who's that?

LITTLE MONK. Miss Virginia's intended. What's the matter with your eyes?

GALILEO [*blinking*]. Oh yes, it's Ludovico, so it is. Well! Sarti, get a jug of that Sicilian wine, the old kind. We celebrate.

[*Everybody sits down. MRS. SARTI has left, followed by LUDOVICO'S SERVANT.*]

GALILEO. Well, Ludovico, old man. How are the horses?

LUDOVICO. The horses are fine.

GALILEO. Fine.

LUDOVICO. But those vineyards need a firm hand. [*To VIRGINIA.*] You look pale. Country life will suit you. Mother's planning on September.

VIRGINIA. I suppose I oughtn't, but stay here, I've got something to show you.

LUDOVICO. What?

VIRGINIA. Never mind. I won't be ten minutes. [*She runs out.*]

LUDOVICO. How's life these days, sir?

GALILEO. Dull. —How was the journey?

LUDOVICO. Dull. —Before I forget, mother sends her congratulations on your admirable tact over the latest rumblings of science.

GALILEO. Thank her from me.

LUDOVICO. Christopher Clavius had all Rome on its ears. He said he was afraid that the turning around business might crop up again on account of these spots on the sun.

ANDREA. Clavius is on the same track! [*To LUDOVICO.*] My mother's baskets are full of letters from all over Europe asking Mr. Galilei's opinion.

GALILEO. I am engaged in investigating the habits of floating bodies. Any harm in that?

[*MRS. SARTI re-enters, followed by the SERVANT. They bring wine and glasses on a tray.*]

GALILEO [*hands out the wine*]. What news from the Holy City, apart from the prospect of my sins?

LUDOVICO. The Holy Father is on his death bed. Hadn't you heard?

LITTLE MONK. My goodness! What about the succession?

LUDOVICO. All the talk is of Barberini.

GALILEO. Barberini?

ANDREA. Mr. Galilei knows Barberini.

LITTLE MONK. Cardinal Barberini is a mathematician.

FEDERZONI. A scientist in the chair of Peter!

[Pause.]

GALILEO [*cheering up enormously*]. This means change. We might live to see the day, Federzoni, when we don't have to whisper that two and two are four. [*To LUDOVICO.*] I like this wine. Don't you, Ludovico?

LUDOVICO. I like it.

GALILEO. I know the hill where it is grown. The slope is steep and stony, the grape almost blue. I am fond of this wine.

LUDOVICO. Yes, sir.

GALILEO. There are shadows in this wine. It is almost sweet, but just stops short.—Andrea, clear that stuff away, ice, bowl and needle.—I cherish the consolations of the flesh. I have no patience with cowards who call them weaknesses. I say there is a certain achievement in enjoying things.

[*The PUPILS get up and go to the experiment table.*]

LITTLE MONK. What are we to do?

FEDERZONI. He is starting on the sun.

[*They begin with clearing up.*]

ANDREA [*singing in a low voice*].

The bible proves the earth stands still,
The Pope, he swears with tears:
The earth stands still. To prove it so
He takes it by the ears.

LUDOVICO. What's the excitement?

MRS. SARTI. You're not going to start those hellish goings-on again, Mr. Galilei?

ANDREA.

And gentlefolk, they say so too.
Each learned doctor proves,
(If you grease his palm): The earth stands still.
And yet—and yet it moves.

GALILEO. Barberini is in the ascendant, so your mother is uneasy, and you're sent to investigate me. Correct me if I am wrong, Ludovico. Clavius is right: these spots on the sun interest me.

ANDREA. We might find out that the sun also revolves. How would you like that, Ludovico?

GALILEO. Do you like my wine, Ludovico?

LUDOVICO. I told you I did, sir.

GALILEO. You really like it?

LUDOVICO. I like it.

GALILEO. Tell me, Ludovico, would you consider going so far as to accept a man's wine or his daughter without insisting that he drop his profession? I have no wish to intrude, but have the moons of Jupiter affected Virginia's bottom?

MRS. SARTI. That isn't funny, it's just vulgar. I am going for Virginia.

LUDOVICO [*keeps her back*]. Marriages in families such as mine are not arranged on a basis of sexual attraction alone.

GALILEO. Did they keep you back from marrying my daughter for eight years because I was on probation?

LUDOVICO. My future wife must take her place in the family pew.

GALILEO. You mean, if the daughter of a bad man sat in your family pew, your peasants might stop paying the rent?

LUDOVICO. In a sort of way.

GALILEO. When I was your age, the only person I allowed to rap me on the knuckles was my girl.

LUDOVICO. My mother was assured that you had undertaken not to get mixed up in this turning around business again, sir.

GALILEO. We had a conservative Pope then.

MRS. SARTI. Had! His Holiness is not dead yet!

GALILEO [*with relish*]. Pretty nearly.

MRS. SARTI. That man will weigh a chip of ice fifty times, but when it comes to something that's convenient, he believes it blindly. "Is His Holiness dead?"—"Pretty nearly!"

LUDOVICO. You will find, sir, if His Holiness passes away, the new Pope, whoever he turns out to be, will respect the convictions held by the solid families of the country.

GALILEO [*to ANDREA*]. That remains to be seen.—Andrea, get out the screen. We'll throw the image of the sun on our screen to save our eyes.

LITTLE MONK. I thought you'd been working at it. Do you know when I guessed it? When you didn't recognize Mr. Marsili.

MRS. SARTI. If my son has to go to hell for sticking to you, that's my affair, but you have no right to trample on your daughter's happiness.

LUDOVICO [*to his SERVANT*]. Giuseppe, take my baggage back to the coach, will you?

MRS. SARTI. This will kill her. [*She runs out, still clutching the jug.*]

LUDOVICO [*politely*]. Mr. Galilei, if we Marsilis were to countenance teachings frowned on by the church, it would unsettle our peasants. Bear in mind these poor people in their brute state get everything upside down. They are nothing but animals. They will never comprehend the finer points of astronomy. Why, two months ago a rumor went around, an apple had been found on a pear tree, and they left their work in the fields to discuss it.

GALILEO [*interested*]. Did they?

LUDOVICO. I have seen the day when my poor mother has had to have a dog whipped before their eyes to remind them to keep their place. Oh, you may have seen the waving corn from the window of your comfortable coach. You have, no doubt, nibbled our olives, and absentmindedly eaten our cheese, but you can have no idea how much responsibility that sort of thing entails.

GALILEO. Young man, I do not eat my cheese absentmindedly. [*To ANDREA.*] Are we ready?

ANDREA. Yes, sir.

GALILEO [*leaves LUDOVICO and adjusts the mirror*]. You would not confine your whippings to dogs to remind your peasants to keep their places, would you, Marsili?

LUDOVICO [*after a pause*]. Mr. Galilei, you have a wonderful brain, it's a pity.

LITTLE MONK [*astonished*]. He threatened you.

GALILEO. Yes. And he threatened you too. We might unsettle his peasants. Your sister, Fulganzio, who works the lever of the olive press, might laugh out loud if she heard the sun is not a gilded coat of arms but a lever too. The earth turns because the sun turns it.

ANDREA. That could interest his steward too and even his money lender—and the seaport towns. . . .

FEDERZONI. None of them speak Latin.

GALILEO. I might write in plain language. The work we do is exacting. Who would go through the strain for less than the population at large!

LUDOVICO. I see you have made your decision. It was inevitable. You will always be a slave of your passions. Excuse me to Virginia, I think it's as well I don't see her now.

GALILEO. The dowry is at your disposal at any time.

LUDOVICO. Good afternoon. [*He goes followed by the SERVANT.*]

ANDREA. Exit Ludovico. To hell with all Marsilis, Villanis, Orsinis, Canes, Nuccolis, Soldanieris. . . .

FEDERZONI. . . . who ordered the earth stand still because their castles might be shaken loose if it revolves. . . .

LITTLE MONK. . . . and who only kiss the Pope's feet as long as he uses them to trample on the people. God made the physical world, God made the human brain. God will allow physics.

ANDREA. They will try to stop us.

GALILEO. Thus we enter the observation of these spots on the sun in which we are interested, at our own risk, not counting on protection from a problematical new Pope. . . .

ANDREA. . . . but with great likelihood of dispelling Fabrizio's vapors, and the shadows of Paris and Prague, and of establishing the rotation of the sun. . . .

GALILEO. . . . and with *some* likelihood of establishing the rotation of the sun. My intention is not to prove that I was right but to find out *whether* I was right. "Abandon hope all ye who enter—an observation."¹⁶ Before assuming these phenomena are spots, which would suit us, let us first set about proving that they are not—fried fish. We crawl by inches. What we find today we will wipe from the blackboard tomorrow and reject it—unless it shows up again the day after tomorrow. And if we find anything which would suit us, that thing we will eye with particular distrust. In fact, we will approach this observing of the sun with the implacable determination to prove that the earth stands still and only if hopelessly defeated in this pious undertaking can we allow ourselves to wonder if we may not have been right all the time: the earth revolves. Take the cloth off the telescope and turn it on the sun.

[*Quietly they start work. When the corruscating image of the sun is focused on the screen, VIRGINIA enters hurriedly, her wedding dress on, her hair disheveled, MRS. SARTI with her, carrying her wedding veil. The two women realize what has happened. VIRGINIA faints. ANDREA, LITTLE MONK and GALILEO rush to her. FEDERZONI continues working.*]

¹⁶ In Dante's *Divine Comedy*, the inscription above the gates of Hell is "Abandon hope all ye who enter here."

SCENE IX

*On April Fool's Day, thirty two,
Of science there was much ado:
People had learned from Galilei:
They used his teaching in their way.*

Around the corner from the market place a STREET SINGER and his WIFE, who is costumed to represent the earth in a skeleton globe made of thin bands of brass, are holding the attention of a sprinkling of representative citizens, some in masquerade who were on their way to see the carnival procession. From the market place the noise of an impatient crowd.

BALLAD SINGER [*accompanied by his WIFE on the guitar*].

When the Almighty made the universe
He made the earth and then he made the sun.
Then round the earth he bade the sun to turn—
That's in the bible, Genesis, Chapter One.
And from that time all beings here below
Were in obedient circles meant to go:

Around the pope the cardinals
Around the cardinals the bishops
Around the bishops the secretaries
Around the secretaries the aldermen
Around the aldermen the craftsmen
Around the craftsmen the servants
Around the servants the dogs, the chickens, and the beggars.

[A conspicuous reveller—henceforth called the SPINNER—has slowly caught on and is exhibiting his idea of spinning around. He does not lose dignity, he faints with mock grace.]

BALLAD SINGER.

Up stood the learned Galileo
Glanced briefly at the sun
And said: "Almighty God was wrong
In Genesis, Chapter One!"

Now that was rash, my friends, it is no matter small
For heresy will spread today like foul diseases.
Change Holy Writ, forsooth? What will be left at all?
Why: each of us would say and do just what he pleases!

[Three wretched EXTRAS, employed by the chamber of commerce, enter. Two of them, in ragged costumes, moodily bear a litter with a mock throne. The third sits on the throne. He wears sacking, a false beard, a prop crown, he carries a prop orb and sceptre, and around his chest the inscription "THE KING OF HUNGARY." The litter has a card with "No. 4" written on it. The litter bearers dump him down and listen to the BALLAD SINGER.]

BALLAD SINGER.

Good people, what will come to pass
If Galileo's teachings spread?
No altar boy will serve the mass
No servant girl will make the bed.

Now that is grave, my friends, it is no matter small:

For independent spirit spreads like foul diseases!
(Yet life is sweet and man is weak and after all—
How nice it is, for a little change, to do just as one pleases!)

[The BALLAD SINGER takes over the guitar. His WIFE dances around him, illustrating the motion of the earth. A COBBLER'S BOY with a pair of resplendent lacquered boots hung over his shoulder has been jumping up and down in mock excitement. There are three more children, dressed as grownups among the spectators, two together and a single one with mother. The COBBLER'S BOY takes the three CHILDREN in hand, forms a chain and leads it, moving to the music, in and out among the spectators, "whipping" the chain so that the last child bumps into people. On the way past a PEASANT WOMAN, he steals an egg from her basket. She gestures to him to return it. As he passes her again he quietly breaks the egg over her head. The KING OF HUNGARY ceremoniously hands his orb to one of his bearers, marches down with mock dignity, and chastises the COBBLER'S BOY. The parents remove the three CHILDREN. The unseemliness subsides.]

BALLAD SINGER.

The carpenters take wood and build
Their houses—not the church's pews.
And members of the cobblers' guild
Now boldly walk the streets—in shoes.
The tenant kicks the noble lord
Quite off the land he owned—like that!
The milk his wife once gave the priest
Now makes (at last!) her children fat.

Ts, ts, ts, ts, my friends, this is no matter small
For independent spirit spreads like foul diseases
People must keep their place, some down and some on top!
(Though it is nice, for a little change, to do just as one pleases!)

[The COBBLER'S BOY has put on the lacquered boots he was carrying. He struts off. The BALLAD SINGER takes over the guitar again. His WIFE dances around him in increased tempo. A MONK has been standing near a rich COUPLE, who are in subdued costly clothes, without masks: shocked at the song, he now leaves. A DWARF in the costume of an astronomer turns his telescope on the departing MONK, thus drawing attention to the rich COUPLE. In imitation of the COBBLER'S BOY, the SPINNER forms a chain of grownups. They move to the music, in and out, and between the rich COUPLE. The SPINNER changes the GENTLEMAN'S bonnet for the ragged hat of a BEGGAR. The GENTLEMAN decides to take this in good part, and a GIRL is emboldened to take his dagger. The GENTLEMAN is miffed, throws the BEGGAR'S hat back. The BEGGAR discards the GENTLEMAN'S bonnet and drops it on the ground. The KING OF HUNGARY has walked from his throne, taken an egg from the PEASANT WOMAN, and paid for it. He now ceremoniously breaks it over the GENTLEMAN'S head as he is bending down to pick up his bonnet. The GENTLEMAN conducts the LADY away from the scene. The KING OF HUNGARY, about to resume his throne, finds one of the CHILDREN sitting on it. The GENTLEMAN returns to retrieve his dagger. Merriment. The BALLAD SINGER wanders off. This is part of his routine. His WIFE sings to the SPINNER.]

WIFE.

Now speaking for myself I feel

That I could also do with a change.
You know, for me . . . [*Turning to a reveller.*] . . . you have appeal
Maybe tonight we could arrange . . .

[*The DWARF-ASTRONOMER has been amusing the people by focusing his telescope on her legs. The BALLAD SINGER has returned.*]

BALLAD SINGER.

No, no, no, no, no, stop, Galileo, stop!
For independent spirit spreads like foul diseases
People must keep their place, some down and some on top!
(Though it is nice, for a little change, to do just as one pleases!)

[*The SPECTATORS stand embarrassed. A GIRL laughs loudly.*]

BALLAD SINGER [*and his WIFE*].

Good people who have trouble here below
In serving cruel lords and gentle Jesus
Who bids you turn the other cheek just so . . . [*With mimicry.*]
While they prepare to strike the second blow:
Obedience will never cure your woe
So each of you wake up and do just as he pleases!

[*The BALLAD SINGER and his WIFE hurriedly start to try to sell pamphlets to the spectators.*]

BALLAD SINGER. Read all about the earth going round the sun, two centesimi only. As proved by the great Galileo. Two centesimi only. Written by a local scholar. Understandable to one and all. Buy one for your friends, your children and your aunty Rosa, two centesimi only. Abbreviated but complete. Fully illustrated with pictures of the planets, including Venus, two centesimi only.

[*During the speech of the BALLAD SINGER we hear the carnival procession approaching followed by laughter. A REVELLER rushes in.*]

REVELLER. The procession!

[*The litter bearers speedily joggle out the KING OF HUNGARY. The SPECTATORS turn and look at the first float of the procession, which now makes its appearance. It bears a gigantic figure of GALILEO, holding in one hand an open bible with the pages crossed out. The other hand points to the bible, and the head mechanically turns from side to side as if to say "No! No!"*]

A LOUD VOICE. Galileo the bible killer!

[*The laughter from the market place becomes uproarious. The MONK comes flying from the market place followed by delighted CHILDREN.*]

SCENE X

*The depths are hot, the heights are chill
The streets are loud, the court is still.*

Ante-Chamber and staircase in the Medicean palace in Florence. GALILEO, with a book under his arm, waits with his DAUGHTER to be admitted to the presence of the PRINCE.

VIRGINIA. They are a long time.

GALILEO. Yes.

VIRGINIA. Who is that funny looking man? [*She indicates the INFORMER, who has entered casually and seated himself in the background, taking no apparent notice of GALILEO.*]

GALILEO. I don't know.

VIRGINIA. It's not the first time I have seen him around. He gives me the creeps.

GALILEO. Nonsense. We're in Florence, not among robbers in the mountains of Corsica.

VIRGINIA. Here comes the Rector.

[*The RECTOR comes down the stairs.*]

GALILEO. Gaffone is a bore. He attaches himself to you.

[*The RECTOR passes, scarcely nodding.*]

GALILEO. My eyes are bad today. Did he acknowledge us?

VIRGINIA. Barely. [*Pause.*] What's in your book? Will they say it's heretical?

GALILEO. You hang around church too much. And getting up at dawn and scurrying to mass is ruining your skin. You pray for me, don't you?

[*A MAN comes down the stairs.*]

VIRGINIA. Here's Mr. Matti. You designed a machine for his Iron Foundries.

MATTI. How were the squabs, Mr. Galilei? [*Low.*] My brother and I had a good laugh the other day. He picked up a racy pamphlet against the bible somewhere. It quoted you.

GALILEO. The squabs, Matti, were wonderful, thank you again. Pamphlets I know nothing about. The bible and Homer are my favorite reading.

MATTI. No necessity to be cautious with me, Mr. Galilei. I am on your side. I am not a man who knows about the motions of the stars, but you have championed the freedom to teach new things. Take that mechanical cultivator they have in Germany which you described to me. I can tell you, it will never be used in this country. The same circles that are hampering you now will forbid the physicians at Bologna to cut up corpses for research. Do you know, they have such things as money markets in Amsterdam and in London? Schools for business, too. Regular papers with news. Here we are not even free to make money. I have a stake in your career. They are against iron foundries because they say the gathering of so many workers in one place fosters immorality! If they ever try anything, Mr. Galilei, remember you have friends in all walks of life including an iron founder. Good luck to you. [*He goes.*]

GALILEO. Good man, but need he be so affectionate in public? His voice carries. They will always claim me as their spiritual leader particularly in places where it doesn't help me at all. I have written a book about the mechanics of the firmament, that is all. What they do or don't do with it is not my concern.

VIRGINIA [*loud*]. If people only knew how you disagreed with those goings-on all over the country last All Fools day.

GALILEO. Yes. Offer honey to a bear, and lose your arm if the beast is hungry.

VIRGINIA [*low*]. Did the prince ask you to come here today?

GALILEO. I sent word I was coming. He will want the book, he has paid for it. My health hasn't been any too good lately. I may accept Sagredo's invitation to stay with him in Padua for a few weeks.

VIRGINIA. You couldn't manage without your books.

GALILEO. Sagredo has an excellent library.

VIRGINIA. We haven't had this month's salary yet—

GALILEO. Yes. [*The CARDINAL INQUISITOR passes down the staircase. He bows deeply in answer to GALILEO's bow.*] What is he doing in Florence? If they try to do anything to me, the new Pope will meet them with an iron NO. And the Prince is my pupil, he would never have me extradited.

VIRGINIA. Psst. The Lord Chamberlain.

[*The LORD CHAMBERLAIN comes down the stairs.*]

LORD CHAMBERLAIN. His Highness had hoped to find time for you, Mr. Galilei. Unfortunately, he has to leave immediately to judge the parade at the Riding Academy. On what business did you wish to see His Highness?

GALILEO. I wanted to present my book to His Highness.

LORD CHAMBERLAIN. How are your eyes today?

GALILEO. So, so. With His Highness' permission, I am dedicating the book . . .

LORD CHAMBERLAIN. Your eyes are a matter of great concern to His Highness. Could it be that you have been looking too long and too often through your marvelous tube? [*He leaves without accepting the book.*]

VIRGINIA [*greatly agitated*]. Father, I am afraid.

GALILEO. He didn't take the book, did he? [*Low and resolute.*] Keep a straight face. We are not going home, but to the house of the lens-grinder. There is a coach and horses in his backyard. Keep your eyes to the front, don't look back at that man.

[*They start. The LORD CHAMBERLAIN comes back.*]

LORD CHAMBERLAIN. Oh, Mr. Galilei, His Highness has just charged me to inform you that the Florentine Court is no longer in a position to oppose the request of the Holy Inquisition to interrogate you in Rome.

SCENE XI

The Pope

A chamber in the Vatican. The POPE, URBAN VIII—formerly Cardinal BARBERINI—is giving audience to the CARDINAL INQUISITOR. The trampling and shuffling of many feet is heard throughout the scene from the adjoining corridors. During the scene the POPE is being robed for the conclave he is about to attend: at the beginning of the scene he is plainly BARBERINI, but as the scene proceeds he is more and more obscured by grandiose vestments.

POPE. No! No! No!

INQUISITOR [*referring to the owners of the shuffling feet*]. Doctors of all chairs from the universities, representatives of the special orders of the Church,

representatives of the clergy as a whole who have come believing with child-like faith in the word of God as set forth in the Scriptures, who have come to hear Your Holiness confirm their faith: and Your Holiness is really going to tell them that the bible can no longer be regarded as the alphabet of truth?

POPE. I will not set myself up against the multiplication table. No!

INQUISITOR. Ah, that is what these people say, that it is the multiplication table. Their cry is, "The figures compel us," but where do these figures come from? Plainly they come from doubt. These men doubt everything. Can society stand on doubt and not on faith? "Thou art my master, but I doubt whether it is for the best." "This is my neighbor's house and my neighbor's wife, but why shouldn't they belong to me?" After the plague, after the new war, after the unparalleled disaster of the Reformation, your dwindling flock look to their shepherd, and now the mathematicians turn their tubes on the sky and announce to the world that you have not the best advice about the heavens either—up to now your only uncontested sphere of influence. This Galilei started meddling in machines at an early age. Now that men in ships are venturing on the great oceans—I am not against that of course—they are putting their faith in a brass-bowl they call a compass and not in Almighty God.

POPE. This man is the greatest physicist of our time. He is the light of Italy, and not just any muddle-head.

INQUISITOR. Would we have had to arrest him otherwise? This bad man knows what he is doing, not writing his books in Latin, but in the jargon of the market place.

POPE [*occupied with the shuffling feet*]. That was not in the best of taste. [*A pause.*] These shuffling feet are making me nervous.

INQUISITOR. May they be more telling than my words, Your Holiness. Shall all these go from you with doubt in their hearts?

POPE. This man has friends. What about Versailles? What about the Viennese court? They will call Holy Church a cesspool for defunct ideas. Keep your hands off him.

INQUISITOR. In practice it will never get far. He is a man of the flesh. He would soften at once.

POPE. He has more enjoyment in him than any man I ever saw. He loves eating and drinking and thinking. To excess. He indulges in thinking-bouts! He cannot say no to an old wine or a new thought. [*Furious.*] I do not want a condemnation of physical facts. I do not want to hear battle cries: Church, church, church! Reason, reason, reason! [*Pause.*] These shuffling feet are intolerable. Has the whole world come to my door?

INQUISITOR. Not the whole world, Your Holiness. A select gathering of the faithful.

[*Pause.*]

POPE [*exhausted*]. It is clearly understood. he is not to be tortured. [*Pause.*] At the very most, he may be shown the instruments.

INQUISITOR. That will be adequate, Your Holiness. Mr. Galilei understands machinery.

[*The eyes of BARBERINI look helplessly at the CARDINAL INQUISITOR from under the completely assembled panoply of POPE URBAN VIII.*]

SCENE XII

*June twenty second, sixteen thirty three,
A momentous date for you and me.
Of all the days that was the one
An age of reason could have begun.*

Again the garden of the Florentine AMBASSADOR at Rome, where GALILEO's assistants wait the news of the trial. The LITTLE MONK and FEDERZONI are attempting to concentrate on a game of chess. VIRGINIA kneels in a corner, praying and counting her beads.

LITTLE MONK. The Pope didn't even grant him an audience.

FEDERZONI. No more scientific discussions.

ANDREA. The "Discorsi" will never be finished. The sum of his findings. They will kill him.

FEDERZONI [*stealing a glance at him*]. Do you really think so?

ANDREA. He will never recant.

[*Silence.*]

LITTLE MONK. You know when you lie awake at night how your mind fastens on to something irrelevant. Last night I kept thinking: if only they would let him take his little stone in with him, the appeal-to-reason-pebble that he always carries in his pocket.

FEDERZONI. In the room *they'll* take him to, he won't have a pocket.

ANDREA. But he will not recant.

LITTLE MONK. How can they beat the truth out of a man who gave his sight in order to see?

FEDERZONI. Maybe they can't.

[*Silence.*]

ANDREA [*speaking about VIRGINIA*]. She is praying that he will recant.

FEDERZONI. Leave her alone. She doesn't know whether she's on her head or on her heels since they got hold of her. They brought her Father Confessor from Florence.

[*The INFORMER of Scene X enters.*]

INFORMER. Mr. Galilei will be here soon. He may need a bed.

FEDERZONI. Have they let him out?

INFORMER. Mr. Galilei is expected to recant at five o'clock. The big bell of Saint Marcus will be rung and the complete text of his recantation publicly announced.

ANDREA. I don't believe it.

INFORMER. Mr. Galilei will be brought to the garden gate at the back of the house, to avoid the crowds collecting in the streets. [*He goes.*]

[*Silence.*]

ANDREA. The moon is an earth because the light of the moon is not her own. Jupiter is a fixed star, and four moons turn around Jupiter, therefore we are not shut in by crystal shells. The sun is the pivot of our world, therefore the earth is not the center. The earth moves, spinning about the sun. And he showed us. You can't make a man unsee what he has seen.

[*Silence.*]

FEDERZONI. Five o'clock in one minute.

[*VIRGINIA prays louder.*]

ANDREA. Listen all of you, they are murdering the truth.

[He stops up his ears with his fingers. The two other pupils do the same. FEDERZONI goes over to the LITTLE MONK, and all of them stand absolutely still in cramped positions. Nothing happens. No bell sounds. After a silence, filled with the murmur of VIRGINIA's prayers, FEDERZONI runs to the wall to look at the clock. He turns around, his expression changed. He shakes his head. They drop their hands.]

FEDERZONI. No. No bell. It is three minutes after.

LITTLE MONK. He hasn't.

ANDREA. He held true. It is all right, it is all right.

LITTLE MONK. He did not recant.

FEDERZONI. No.

[They embrace each other, they are delirious with joy.]

ANDREA. So force cannot accomplish everything. What has been seen can't be unseen. Man is constant in the face of death.

FEDERZONI. June 22, 1633: dawn of the age of reason. I wouldn't have wanted to go on living if he had recanted.

LITTLE MONK. I didn't say anything, but I was in agony. Oh, ye of little faith!

ANDREA. I was sure.

FEDERZONI. It would have turned our morning to night.

ANDREA. It would have been as if the mountain had turned to water.

LITTLE MONK [kneeling down, crying]. Oh God, I thank Thee.

ANDREA. Beaten humanity can lift its head. A man has stood up and said "no." [At this moment the bell of Saint Marcus begins to toll. They stand like statues. VIRGINIA stands up.]

VIRGINIA. The bell of Saint Marcus. He is not damned.

[From the street one hears the TOWN CRIER reading GALILEO's recantation.]

TOWN CRIER. I, Galileo Galilei, Teacher of Mathematics and Physics, do hereby publicly renounce my teaching that the earth moves. I forswear this teaching with a sincere heart and unfeigned faith and detest and curse this and all other errors and heresies repugnant to the Holy Scriptures.

[The lights dim; when they come up again the bell of Saint Marcus is petering out. VIRGINIA has gone but the SCHOLARS are still there waiting.]

ANDREA [loud]. The mountain did turn to water.

[GALILEO has entered quietly and unnoticed. He is changed, almost unrecognizable. He has heard ANDREA. He waits some seconds by the door for somebody to greet him. Nobody does. They retreat from him. He goes slowly and, because of his bad sight, uncertainly, to the front of the stage where he finds a chair, and sits down.]

ANDREA. I can't look at him. Tell him to go away.

FEDERZONI. Steady.

ANDREA [hysterically]. He saved his big gut.

FEDERZONI. Get him a glass of water.

[The LITTLE MONK fetches a glass of water for ANDREA. Nobody acknowledges the presence of GALILEO, who sits silently on his chair listening to the voice of the TOWN CRIER, now in another street.]

ANDREA. I can walk. Just help me a bit.

[They help him to the door.]

ANDREA [*in the door*]. "Unhappy is the land that breeds no hero."
GALILEO. No, Andrea: "Unhappy is the land that needs a hero."

[*Before the next scene a curtain with the following legend on it is lowered*]

You can plainly see that if a horse were to fall from a height of three or four feet, it could break its bones, whereas a dog would not suffer injury. The same applies to a cat from a height of as much as eight or ten feet, to a grasshopper from the top of a tower, and to an ant falling down from the moon. Nature could not allow a horse to become as big as twenty horses nor a giant as big as ten men, unless she were to change the proportions of all its members, particularly the bones. Thus the common assumption that great and small structures are equally tough is obviously wrong.

—From the DISCORSI

SCENE XIII

1633-1642

*Galileo Galilei remains a prisoner
of the Inquisition until his death.*

A country house near Florence. A large room simply furnished. There is a huge table, a leather chair, a globe of the world on a stand, and a narrow bed. A portion of the adjoining anteroom is visible, and the front door which opens into it.

An OFFICIAL OF THE INQUISITION sits on guard in the anteroom.

In the large room, GALILEO is quietly experimenting with a bent wooden rail and a small ball of wood. He is still vigorous but almost blind.

After a while there is a knocking at the outside door. The OFFICIAL opens it to a PEASANT who brings a plucked goose. VIRGINIA comes from the kitchen. She is past forty.

PEASANT [*handing the goose to VIRGINIA*]. I was told to deliver this here.
VIRGINIA. I didn't order a goose.

PEASANT. I was told to say it's from someone who was passing through.

[*VIRGINIA takes the goose, surprised. The OFFICIAL takes it from her and examines it suspiciously. Then, reassured, he hands it back to her. The PEASANT goes. VIRGINIA brings the goose in to GALILEO.*]

VIRGINIA. Somebody who was passing through sent you something.

GALILEO. What is it?

VIRGINIA. Can't you see it?

GALILEO. No. [*He walks over.*] A goose. Any name?

VIRGINIA. No.

GALILEO [*weighing the goose*]. Solid.

VIRGINIA [*cautiously*]. Will you eat the liver, if I have it cooked with a little apple?

GALILEO. I had my dinner. Are you under orders to finish me off with food?

VIRGINIA. It's not rich. And what is wrong with your eyes again? You should be able to see it.

GALILEO. You were standing in the light.

VIRGINIA. I was not.—You haven't been writing again?

GALILEO [*sneering*]. What do you think?

[VIRGINIA *takes the goose out into the anteroom and speaks to the OFFICIAL.*]

VIRGINIA. You had better ask Monsignore Carpula to send the doctor. Father couldn't see this goose across the room.—Don't look at me like that. He has not been writing. He dictates everything to me, as you know.

OFFICIAL. Yes?

VIRGINIA. He abides by the rules. My father's repentance is sincere. I keep an eye on him. [*She hands him the goose.*] Tell the cook to fry the liver with an apple and an onion. [*She goes back into the large room.*] And you have no business to be doing that with those eyes of yours, Father.

GALILEO. You may read me some Horace.

VIRGINIA. We should go on with your weekly letter to the Archbishop. Monsignore Carpula to whom we owe so much was all smiles the other day because the Archbishop had expressed his pleasure at your collaboration.

GALILEO. Where were we?

VIRGINIA [*sits down to take his dictation*]. Paragraph four.

GALILEO. Read what you have.

VIRGINIA. "The position of the Church in the matter of the unrest at Genoa. I agree with Cardinal Spoletti in the matter of the unrest among the Venetian ropemakers . . ."

GALILEO. Yes. [*Dictates.*] I agree with Cardinal Spoletti in the matter of the unrest among the Venetian ropemakers: it is better to distribute good nourishing food in the name of charity than to pay them more for their bell-ropes. It being surely better to strengthen their faith than to encourage their acquisitiveness. St. Paul says: Charity never faileth.—How is that?

VIRGINIA. It's beautiful, Father.

GALILEO. It couldn't be taken as irony?

VIRGINIA. No. The Archbishop will like it. It's so practical.

GALILEO. I trust your judgment. Read it over slowly.

VIRGINIA. "The position of the Church in the matter of the unrest. . . ."
[*There is a knocking at the outside door. VIRGINIA goes into the anteroom.*

The OFFICIAL opens the door. It is ANDREA.]

ANDREA. Good evening. I am sorry to call so late, I'm on my way to Holland. I was asked to look him up. Can I go in?

VIRGINIA. I don't know whether he will see you. You never came.

ANDREA. Ask him.

[GALILEO *recognizes the voice. He sits motionless. VIRGINIA comes in to*

GALILEO.]

GALILEO. Is that Andrea?

VIRGINIA. Yes. [*Pause.*] I will send him away.

GALILEO. Show him in.

[VIRGINIA *shows ANDREA in. VIRGINIA sits, ANDREA remains standing.*]

ANDREA [*cool*]. Have you been keeping well, Mr. Galilei?

GALILEO. Sit down. What are you doing these days? What are you working on? I heard it was something about hydraulics in Milan.

ANDREA. As he knew I was passing through, Fabricius of Amsterdam asked me to visit you and inquire about your health.

[Pause.]

GALILEO. I am very well.

ANDREA [*formally*]. I am glad I can report you are in good health.

GALILEO. Fabricius will be glad to hear it. And you might inform him that, on account of the depth of my repentance, I live in comparative comfort.

ANDREA. Yes, we understand that the Church is more than pleased with you. Your complete acceptance has had its effect. Not one paper expounding a new thesis has made its appearance in Italy since your submission.

[Pause.]

GALILEO. Unfortunately there are countries not under the wing of the Church. Would you not say the erroneous condemned theories are still taught—there?

ANDREA [*relentless*]. Things are almost at a standstill.

GALILEO. Are they? [Pause.] Nothing from Descartes¹⁷ in Paris?

ANDREA. Yes. On receiving the news of your recantation, he shelved his treatise on the nature of light.

GALILEO. I sometimes worry about my assistants whom I led into error. Have they benefited by my example?

ANDREA. In order to work I have to go to Holland.

GALILEO. Yes.

ANDREA. Federzoni is grinding lenses again, back in some shop.

GALILEO. He can't read the books.

ANDREA. Fulganzio, our little monk, has abandoned research and is resting in peace in the Church.

GALILEO. So. [Pause.] My superiors are looking forward to my spiritual recovery. I am progressing as well as can be expected.

VIRGINIA. You are doing well, Father.

GALILEO. Virginia, leave the room.

[VIRGINIA rises uncertainly and goes out.]

VIRGINIA [*to the OFFICIAL*]. He was his pupil, so now he is his enemy.—Help me in the kitchen.

[She leaves the anteroom with the OFFICIAL.]

ANDREA. May I go now, sir?

GALILEO. I do not know why you came, Sarti. To unsettle me? I have to be prudent.

ANDREA. I'll be on my way.

GALILEO. As it is, I have relapses. I completed the "Discorsi."

ANDREA. You completed what?

GALILEO. My "Discorsi."

ANDREA. How?

GALILEO. I am allowed pen and paper. My superiors are intelligent men. They know the habits of a lifetime cannot be broken abruptly. But they protect me from any unpleasant consequences: they lock my pages away as I dictate them. And I should know better than to risk my comfort. I wrote the

¹⁷ Philosopher, mathematician, and scientist who attempted to apply mathematical methods to philosophy. He made many contributions to scientific knowledge and greatly influenced modern thought.

"Discorsi" out again during the night. The manuscript is in the globe. My vanity has up to now prevented me from destroying it. If you consider taking it, you will shoulder the entire risk. You will say it was pirated from the original in the hands of the Holy Office.

[ANDREA, as if in a trance, has gone to the globe. He lifts the upper half and gets the book. He turns the pages as if wanting to devour them. In the background the opening sentences of the "Discorsi" appear:

MY PURPOSE IS TO SET FORTH A VERY NEW
SCIENCE DEALING WITH A VERY ANCIENT
SUBJECT—MOTION. . . . AND I HAVE
DISCOVERED BY EXPERIMENT SOME PROPERTIES
OF IT WHICH ARE WORTH KNOWING. . . .

GALILEO. I had to employ my time somehow.

[*The text disappears.*]

ANDREA. Two new sciences! This will be the foundation stone of a new physics.

GALILEO. Yes. Put it under your coat.

ANDREA. And we thought you had deserted. [*In a low voice.*] Mr. Galilei, how can I begin to express my shame. Mine has been the loudest voice against you.

GALILEO. That would seem to have been proper. I taught you science and I decried the truth.

ANDREA. Did you? I think not. Everything is changed!

GALILEO. What is changed?

ANDREA. You shielded the truth from the oppressor. Now I see! In your dealings with the Inquisition you used the same superb common sense you brought to physics.

GALILEO. Oh!

ANDREA. We lost our heads. With the crowd at the street corners we said: "He will die, he will never surrender!" You came back: "I surrendered but I am alive." We cried: "Your hands are stained!" You say: "Better stained than empty."

GALILEO. "Better stained than empty."—It sounds realistic. Sounds like me.

ANDREA. And I of all people should have known. I was twelve when you sold another man's telescope to the Venetian Senate, and saw you put it to immortal use. Your friends were baffled when you bowed to the Prince of Florence: Science gained a wider audience. You always laughed at heroics. "People who suffer bore me," you said. "Misfortunes are due mainly to miscalculations." And: "If there are obstacles, the shortest line between two points may be the crooked line."

GALILEO. It makes a picture.

ANDREA. And when you stooped to recant in 1633, I should have understood that you were again about your business.

GALILEO. My business being?

ANDREA. Science. The study of the properties of motion, mother of the machines which will themselves change the ugly face of the earth.

GALILEO. Aha!

ANDREA. You gained time to write a book that only you could write. Had you burned at the stake in a blaze of glory they would have won.

GALILEO. They have won. And there is no such thing as a scientific work that only one man can write.

ANDREA. Then why did you recant, tell me that!

GALILEO. I recanted because I was afraid of physical pain.

ANDREA. No!

GALILEO. They showed me the instruments.

ANDREA. It was not a plan?

GALILEO. It was not.

[Pause.]

ANDREA. But you have contributed. Science has only one commandment: contribution. And you have contributed more than any man for a hundred years.

GALILEO. Have I? Then welcome to my gutter, dear colleague in science and brother in treason: I sold out, you are a buyer. The first sight of the book! His mouth watered and his scoldings were drowned. Blessed be our bargaining, whitewashing, deathfearing community!

ANDREA. The fear of death is human.

GALILEO. Even the Church will teach you that to be weak is not human. It is just evil.

ANDREA. The church, yes! But science is not concerned with our weaknesses.

GALILEO. No? My dear Sarti, in spite of my present convictions, I may be able to give you a few pointers as to the concerns of your chosen profession.

[Enter VIRGINIA with a platter.]

In my spare time, I happen to have gone over this case. I have spare time.—Even a man who sells wool, however good he is at buying wool cheap and selling it dear, must be concerned with the standing of the wool trade. The practice of science would seem to call for valor. She trades in knowledge, which is the product of doubt. And this new art of doubt has enchanted the public. The plight of the multitude is old as the rocks, and is believed to be basic as the rocks. But now they have learned to doubt. They snatched the telescopes out of our hands and had them trained on their tormentors: prince, official, public moralist. The mechanism of the heavens was clearer, the mechanism of their courts was still murky. The battle to measure the heavens is won by doubt; by credulity the Roman housewife's battle for milk will always be lost. Word is passed down that this is of no concern to the scientist who is told he will only release such of his findings as do not disturb the peace, that is, the peace of mind of the well-to-do. Threats and bribes fill the air. Can the scientist hold out on the numbers?—For what reason do you labor? I take it the intent of science is to ease human existence. If you give way to coercion, science can be crippled, and your new machines may simply suggest new drudgeries. Should you then, in time, discover all there is to be discovered, your progress must then become a progress away from the bulk of humanity. The gulf might even grow so wide that the sound of your cheering at some new achievement would be echoed by a universal howl of horror.—As a scientist I had an almost unique opportunity. In my day astronomy emerged into the market place. At that particular time, had one man put up a fight, it could have had wide repercussions. I have come to believe that I was never in real danger; for some years I was as strong as the

authorities, and I surrendered my knowledge to the powers that be, to use it, no, not *use* it, *abuse* it, as it suits their ends. I have betrayed my profession. Any man who does what I have done must not be tolerated in the ranks of science.

[VIRGINIA, *who has stood motionless, puts the platter on the table.*]

VIRGINIA. You are accepted in the ranks of the faithful, Father.

GALILEO [*sees her*]. Correct. [*He goes over to the table.*] I have to eat now.

VIRGINIA. We lock up at eight.

ANDREA. I am glad I came. [*He extends his hand. GALILEO ignores it and goes over to his meal.*]

GALILEO [*examining the plate; to ANDREA*]. Somebody who knows me sent me a goose. I still enjoy eating.

ANDREA. And your opinion is now that the "new age" was an illusion?

GALILEO. Well.—This age of ours turned out to be a whore, spattered with blood. Maybe, new ages look like blood-spattered whores. Take care of yourself.

ANDREA. Yes. [*Unable to go.*] With reference to your evaluation of the author in question—I do not know the answer. But I cannot think that your savage analysis is the last word.

GALILEO. Thank you, sir.

[OFFICIAL *knocks at the door.*]

VIRGINIA [*showing ANDREA out*]. I don't like visitors from the past, they excite him.

[*She lets him out. The OFFICIAL closes the iron door. VIRGINIA returns.*]

GALILEO [*eating*]. Did you try and think who sent the goose?

VIRGINIA. Not Andrea.

GALILEO. Maybe not. I gave Redhead his first lesson; when he held out his hand, I had to remind myself he is teaching now.—How is the sky tonight?

VIRGINIA [*at the window*]. Bright.

[GALILEO *continues eating.*]

SCENE XIV

*The great book o'er the border went
And, good folk, that was the end.
But we hope you'll keep in mind
You and I were left behind.*

Before a little Italian customs house early in the morning. ANDREA sits upon one of his traveling trunks at the barrier and reads GALILEO's book. The window of a small house is still lit, and a big grotesque shadow, like an old witch and her cauldron, falls upon the house wall beyond. Barefoot CHILDREN in rags see it and point to the little house.

CHILDREN [*singing*].

One, two, three, four, five, six,
Old Marina is a witch.

At night, on a broomstick she sits
And on the church steeple she spits.

CUSTOMS OFFICER [*to ANDREA*]. Why are you making this journey?

ANDREA. I am a scholar.

CUSTOMS OFFICER [*to his CLERK*]. Put down under "reason for leaving the country": Scholar. [*He points to the baggage.*] Books! Anything dangerous in these books?

ANDREA. What is dangerous?

CUSTOMS OFFICER. Religion. Politics.

ANDREA. These are nothing but mathematical formulas.

CUSTOMS OFFICER. What's that?

ANDREA. Figures.

CUSTOMS OFFICER. Oh, figures. No harm in figures. Just wait a minute, sir, we will soon have your papers stamped. *He exits with CLERK.*

[*Meanwhile, a little council of war among the CHILDREN has taken place. ANDREA quietly watches. One of the BOYS, pushed forward by the others, creeps up to the little house from which the shadow comes, and takes the jug of milk on the doorstep.*]

ANDREA [*quietly*]. What are you doing with that milk?

BOY [*stopping in mid-movement*]. She is a witch.

[*The other CHILDREN run away behind the Customs House. One of them shouts, "Run, Paolo!"*]

ANDREA. Hmm! — — And because she is a witch she mustn't have milk. Is that the idea?

BOY. Yes.

ANDREA. And how do you know she is a witch?

BOY [*points to shadow on house wall*]. Look!

ANDREA. Oh! I see.

BOY. And she rides on a broomstick at night—and she bewitches the coachman's horses. My cousin Luigi looked through the hole in the stable roof, that the snow storm made, and heard the horses coughing something terrible.

ANDREA. Oh!—How big was the hole in the stable roof?

BOY. Luigi didn't tell. Why?

ANDREA. I was asking because maybe the horses got sick because it was cold in the stable. You had better ask Luigi how big that hole is.

BOY. You are not going to say Old Marina isn't a witch, because you can't.

ANDREA. No, I can't say she isn't a witch. I haven't looked into it. A man can't know about a thing he hasn't looked into, or can he?

BOY. No!—But THAT! [*He points to the shadow.*] She is stirring hell-broth.

ANDREA. Let's see. Do you want to take a look? I can lift you up.

BOY. You lift me to the window, mister! [*He takes a sling shot out of his pocket.*] I can really bash her from there.

ANDREA. Hadn't we better make sure she is a witch before we shoot? I'll hold that.

[*The BOY puts the milk jug down and follows him reluctantly to the window. ANDREA lifts the boy up so that he can look in.*]

ANDREA. What do you see?

BOY [*slowly*]. Just an old girl cooking porridge.

ANDREA. Oh! Nothing to it then. Now look at her shadow, Paolo.

[The BOY looks over his shoulder and back and compares the reality and the shadow.]

BOY. The big thing is a soup ladle.

ANDREA. Ah! A ladle! You see, I would have taken it for a broomstick, but I haven't looked into the matter as you have, Paolo. Here is your sling.

CUSTOMS OFFICER [returning with the CLERK and handing ANDREA his papers]. All present and correct. Good luck, sir.

[ANDREA goes, reading GALILEO's book. The CLERK starts to bring his baggage after him. The barrier rises. ANDREA passes through, still reading the book. The BOY kicks over the milk jug.]

BOY [shouting after ANDREA]. She is a witch! She is a witch!

ANDREA. You saw with your own eyes: think it over!

[The BOY joins the others. They sing.]

One, two, three, four, five, six,
Old Marina is a witch.

At night, on a broomstick she sits
And on the church steeple she spits.

[The CUSTOMS OFFICERS laugh. ANDREA goes.]

COMMENTARY

Of the circumstances of Galileo's career that are set forth in Brecht's play, a great many are at variance with historical actuality. Thus, although it is true that the manuscript of *Two New Sciences* had to be smuggled out of the country to be published in Holland, this was done not by Andrea Sarti but by no less a person than Prince Mattia de' Medici. As a matter of fact, there was no Andrea Sarti in Galileo's life, and no Mrs. Sarti; they are inventions of the author. During his last years on his little farm at Arcetri, near Florence, Galileo was not attended by his daughter Virginia; she died, at the age of thirty-four, just after he entered the period of house arrest which was to end only with his death. And, indeed, Virginia never lived with her father after her early girlhood—Galileo had put his two illegitimate daughters into the convent at Arcetri when they were very young and both had become nuns. Virginia was nothing like the dull girl of the play. Remarkable both for her intelligence and her saintly disposition, she adored her father and he adored her, and despite her religious vocation, she approved of his work and followed it eagerly.

Although Galileo at Arcetri was strictly supervised by the Inquisition, he did not live in complete isolation. Many distinguished travelers came to pay him their respects, it was so much the thing to do that one of Galileo's biographers notes it as strange that Descartes failed to make a call when he was in Florence. Among the visitors were John Milton and Thomas Hobbes from England, and Gassendi, the famous mathematician, from France. In 1639 a gifted young scientist of eighteen by the name of Viviani attached himself to the old master as an affectionate disciple and close companion; this precocious youth was later to become the leading mathematician of his age. Castelli, the Benedictine monk who had long been Galileo's favorite pupil, spent consider-

able time with him. Torricelli, the famous physicist, took up residence on the farm for a period and worked with Galileo on his theories of mechanics. So much for Brecht's representation of Galileo as doing his last work in snatched clandestine moments. So much, too, for the idea that Galileo was held in contempt by his pupils and fellow workers for having abjured his views under pressure from the Inquisition.

It is also worth observing that the intellectual position of the Church in its condemnation of Galileo was much less assured and positive than we might guess from what the play tells us; as one scholar says, the Church acted with "dogmatic timidity," for although it condemned Galileo's views, it did not venture to assert in a formal way a contrary view. Moreover, the position of the public in regard to the condemnation is inaccurately represented; we are given no adequate indication of the regard in which Galileo was held by people of all classes, including important sections of the aristocracy and the clergy. And Galileo himself was an altogether larger person than Brecht has chosen to show, more conscious, intelligent, and brilliant, more powerful and forthright in polemic, and more complex intellectually, for there is every evidence that, although anticlerical, he found no difficulty in being a sincere and devout Catholic. Even his fault of vanity was on a larger scale than the play suggests.

To remark on Brecht's departures from historical fact does not constitute an adverse criticism of *Galileo*. It has never been thought incumbent upon the author of a historical play to conform to the way things really were; Shakespeare, for an obvious example, plays fast and loose with history. The loyalty of the dramatist is not to fact but to dramatic effectiveness and such moral truth as drama may propose, and he has always had the privilege of omitting and altering circumstances to suit his artistic and moral purpose. But in this instance the playwright's departures from accuracy might seem to entail a sacrifice of advantage. As compared with the historical truth, the play's account of Galileo's career is less rich and complex, less charged with interest than the corresponding actuality, and the characters are less engaging than the real persons upon whom they were modelled. If this is so, it is because Brecht wished it to be so. He precisely did not want his play to be rich and complex. He did not want his characters to be engaging. His theory of drama dictated otherwise.

That theory is best understood through the political passions that give rise to it. Brecht, the son of a middle-class North German family, had experienced to the full the horrors of the First World War—he had served as a surgical orderly—and the extreme social disorders of his nation after its defeat. The bitter anger and contempt that he felt were directed not only upon the powerful classes he held responsible for these evils but also upon the artistic culture of the nation they dominated. In his adverse judgment of the national culture, Brecht had in mind not only those works of art that might be condemned out of hand as manifestly sharing the moral failure of the ruling classes but even that "high" culture whose idealism was commonly understood to be opposed to the crass self-seeking of the wealthy and the powerful. Like many European artists in the period after 1918, Brecht discredited virtually the whole humanistic tradition of art on the grounds that it was essentially, or objectively, an apology for the corrupt and vulgar society out of which it had arisen.

That Brecht became committed to Communism in his youth and maintained the commitment—although sometimes uneasily—until his death, undoubtedly

bears upon his theory of the stage. Yet neither the theory nor the work that exemplified it met with the approval of the Communist Party.¹ Brecht shared with the Party the belief that art must serve a social function and advance the cause of revolutionary progress. But the official position on how this is to be done is notably conservative—the Party is opposed to experiment; its doctrine of “socialist realism,” which requires the writer to inculcate a “positive” morality by stimulating strong, simple emotions on behalf of what is “right” and “good,” might have been formulated, save for its name, by some mediocre Victorian aesthetician—and it could not countenance Brecht’s radicalism in the theatre, which went so far in controverting traditional canons as to seem to subvert the very idea of art.

Brecht set himself implacably against the element of the theatre that has always been thought its very essence: he had nothing but contempt for illusion. He poured scorn upon the devices of composition and production which induce an audience to believe that it is experiencing an actual event to which it responds empathetically, with the emotions that follow upon making an “identification” with the protagonist. Brecht sought to produce the very opposite effect; he wanted his audience to be at a distance and disengaged from what happened on the stage. He spoke of this as the *Verfremdungseffekt*, literally the estranging or alienating effect. The audience is meant to see things, not as the hero sees them, but rather as it is led to see them through the activity of its own intelligence. Its estrangement or distance from the events occurring on the stage does not keep the audience from being interested in what takes place. But it is not to be even momentarily under the illusion that it is witnessing events of real life; it is to be always conscious that what it sees is “nothing but” a play, and one on which the intelligence is invited to exercise itself, and at the moment of performance rather than later, when the emotions have quieted. Brecht avowed it as his intention not to arouse feeling but to initiate thought. The theatre, he insisted at one point in his career, is not meant for enjoyment. By this he meant not so much that the theatre must be “serious” rather than “light” and “entertaining” as that the audience must not sit passive while the performance elicits emotions that, in one way or another, flatter its self-esteem.

In order to deliver his audience from the traditional bondage of illusion and bring it into activity, Brecht rejected many of the hitherto unquestioned criteria of dramatic art. So far from trying to achieve the firm coherence of structure that is regarded as a prime dramatic virtue, he avoided it for the very reason that it is usually valued, because it is instrumental in arousing and directing the emotions of the audience. His plays do not mount to a dramatic climax but tell a story in numerous discrete episodes that are connected only loosely. So far as possible, they avoid the dramatic in favor of the narrative mode; in *Galileo*, for instance, the verses sung at the beginning of each scene to summarize the action that is to follow and the display of quotations from Galileo’s works are consciously nondramatic devices. Brecht’s theoretical preference for the narrative as against the dramatic mode led him to speak of his plays as examples of the “epic” theatre. He had in mind the effect produced by an ancient bard chanting a poem to the warriors gathered in some king’s feasting-hall: though interested

¹ An important exception to the Communist resistance to Brecht is to be found in the success he achieved in the East German Republic. The theatre he founded in East Berlin is devoted chiefly to the production of his plays.

in what they hear, the listeners are not overpowered by it; they are being *told* what has happened, not asked to believe that the event is taking place before their eyes.

The word "epic" is perhaps not a wholly fortunate expression of Brecht's meaning, for it carries connotations of heroic largeness and nobility which Brecht certainly did not intend. Quite the contrary, indeed. Brecht sometimes spoke of his plays as being "non-Aristotelian," a description which referred to their settled indifference to symmetry and coherence of structure and to their avoidance of the strong feelings that would produce what Aristotle called *catharsis* or purgation, a discharge of emotion leading to a state of psychic rest. It also referred to his distrust of whatever might suggest the heroic dignity and grandeur upon which Aristotle put so strong an emphasis in his discussion of tragedy. For Aristotle, tragedy was to a very considerable extent a matter of style; the tragic style depends on the elevation of the characters in the drama as expressed not only in their moral disposition and social status but also in their deportment and manner, above all in their language. Brecht's temperament as a dramatist is defined by nothing so much as his antagonism to the heroic or tragic style. His characters show no trace of it; his language, determinedly colloquial and popular, even "low," and as far removed from the literary language as possible, denies the very credibility, let alone any possible relevance to human affairs, of an elevated style.

A dramaturgy so antagonistic to established tradition naturally calls for its own style of acting. Brecht trained his actors to give up the ideal of impersonation in which they had been reared. Just as he did not want his audience to "identify" with the characters, he did not want his actors to "be" the persons they portrayed. The Moscow Art Theatre had carried the ideal of personification to the point of extravagance; its famous director, Stanislavsky (see pages 249, 251), trained his actors to achieve an actually felt identity with the characters they played. For this method—which had, incidentally, a decisive influence on the Russian theatre and the Communist theory of the drama—Brecht had nothing but contempt. It was for him the extreme example of what he called "culinary" theatre, in which the audience sits passive while being served its meal of emotion. The actors of the "epic" theatre are required to make it plain that they are only actors. They are to speak not as though what they say had just occurred to them but as though they are reporting by quotation what the represented characters had said. And they are to indicate their consciousness of the presence of an audience and their awareness of the doctrinal intentions of the play, communicating the sense that they, like the audience, stand at a cool distance from what happens on the stage.

The theatre, it would seem, has autonomous powers which are not to be controlled by the theory of even so gifted a dramatist as Brecht. Despite his best efforts to achieve distance and estrangement, to circumvent the emotional response of his audiences by the negation of illusion, his plays, charged with the energies of his moral and political purposes, have the effect of enthralling and sometimes of deeply moving those who witness them.

Brecht's theory of the stage goes far toward explaining why *Galileo* departs from historical actuality in so many respects. Almost every manipulation of the real circumstances of Galileo's life is in the direction of making it simpler and more commonplace, by which means, we may suppose, it becomes the more

readily available to the scrutiny and judgment of the audience. A Galileo who happens to have heard about a Dutch device of two lenses in a tube and who makes a little extra cash by giving the appropriated invention to the Venetian senate to manufacture and market, is, presumably, easier to judge than the real Galileo who, having contrived the notable improvements in the telescope that made it an effectual means of research, supplied carefully crafted instruments to the astronomers of Europe, the best that could be had at that time. A Galileo whose character is in part defined by his domestic arrangements, by a dull if dutiful daughter, a bustling housekeeper who tries to keep prudential considerations always to the fore, and assistants who are not notable for intellectual brilliance, is less likely to infect the audience with ideas of heroic dignity and charm than a Galileo who was loved by the remarkable person the real Virginia was, by princes and many dignitaries of the Church, and by younger colleagues whose range of scientific imagination make the invented Andrea and Federzoni look like mere laboratory technicians.

But one of Brecht's manipulations of history cannot be explained by reference to Brecht's theory of the stage. This is the representation of Galileo as having dishonored himself in not choosing death in preference to the abjuration of his beliefs. No modern scholar confirms the play on this point. One of the most authoritative students of Galileo's life, work, and times, Giorgio de Santillana, puts the matter unequivocally: "The abjuration itself is not at all the surrender and moral disgrace that self-appointed judges have made it out to be." We have seen that Galileo's colleagues and co-workers felt none of the scorn that Brecht finds appropriate to the situation. As Professor de Santillana says, Galileo's recantation "was not considered a moral degradation. It was a social degradation, and it was as such that it broke the old man's heart." (Galileo was seventy at the time of his trial.) But although Galileo's heart may have been broken, his spirit, Professor de Santillana goes on to say, was not. He continued his work, and in *Two New Sciences* produced his greatest achievement. In his letters his contempt for those who had condemned him was manifest. His pride was no doubt sustained by the active sympathy of the public, for, to quote Professor de Santillana yet again, "pious believers who would never have touched a Protestant tract, priests, monks, prelates even, vied with one another in buying up copies of the *Dialogue* on the black market to keep them from the hands of the Inquisitors."²

The "self-appointed judges" who hand down their condemnation of Galileo do so on the ground that he valued his life more than the truth. This is wholly to misconceive the situation. Everyone was aware that Galileo had really consented to abjure nothing but his right to publish the truth. For him to have sacrificed his life for this right, in the face of the Church's long-established dominion over the intellectual activity of its communicants in matters that affected belief, would have been not a moral but a political act of a kind that the assumptions of the time did not comprehend. There were, to be sure, men whose religious beliefs led them to renounce the Church and oppose its authority. Such men often suffered martyrdom for their faith. But Galileo was not put on trial for a matter of faith. He himself would have corrected us for speaking of the "beliefs" which he abjured: he did not hold the *belief* that the earth

² Giorgio de Santillana, *The Crime of Galileo*, pp. 320-325 *passim*.

moved around the sun, he possessed the *knowledge* that this was so. It was a fact that did not require the witness of his martyrdom. He felt this the more because to him it was not so much the Church that had condemned him as a successful faction of the clergy and because he knew to what lengths of legal trickery it had had to go in order to secure his condemnation. He also knew how much weight his demonstrations carried with the learned among the higher clergy and understood the significance of the Pope's not making the issue one of dogma, and he could therefore suppose that the Church would eventually reverse itself, as in fact it did a century later.

Opinion will differ as to whether or not Brecht went beyond the legitimate privileges of the historical playwright in representing Galileo as a man who had betrayed the cause of truth. But whichever way opinion goes, it must remain a matter for curiosity why Brecht so grossly distorted the story of Galileo's life, when there were such strong reasons why he might have hesitated to do so.

For one thing, the harsh simplicity of the play's moral judgment violates Brecht's Marxist creed. Marxism is nothing if not historical, and strict in its historicity, and it is one of its essential tenets that conduct cannot be judged by absolute timeless standards but only by reference to the cultural conditions that prevail at a given historical moment. To project backward into the past the standards of the present, as Brecht does, and to condemn Galileo by the criteria of a modern social and political morality is a violation of this idea.

Then, in the light of his almost obsessive desire for an active, thinking audience, it must be wondered why Brecht leads the audience of *Galileo* so simplistically to the conclusion that the protagonist is to be condemned. In the last dialogue between Andrea Sarti and his master, Sarti proposes the idea that Galileo is blameless, for he perceives that in having refused martyrdom the old man had preserved himself to advance the great cause of science by the composition of his last work. But Galileo himself refuses this exculpation; his own condemnation of his conduct is the last word on the matter and the one that the audience is expected to accept, for it has been given no ground for a contrary view. In this instance at least, Brecht is not solicitous for the intellectual activity of his audience; on the contrary, he remorselessly holds the audience in bondage to the historical data he has chosen or invented. And he insists on this conclusion out of what must seem sheer wilfulness. Eric Bentley, who has translated many of Brecht's plays and whose sympathetic criticism has done much to establish the dramatist's reputation, is uncompromising on this score. "One cannot find," Professor Bentley says, "within the boundaries of the play itself, a full justification for the virulence of the final condemnation."³

The wilfulness and the virulence of the final condemnation are especially puzzling in the light of Brecht's earlier views of moral and political intransigence both in his work and in the conduct of his life. One of Brecht's characteristic moral positions is that in circumstances of oppression a man does well to check the impulse to forthright heroism and to seek to achieve his ends by cunning, concealing what he truly thinks or expressing it only obliquely, and biding his time. This was Brecht's own way of dealing with hostile authority—whoever writes about Brecht from knowledge of his life remarks on his unwillingness to expose himself to danger. ". . . He knew how to take care of

³ "The Science Fiction of Bertolt Brecht," the introduction to the Grove Press edition of *Galileo*, 1966, p. 21.

himself," Professor Bentley says and goes on to specify the occasions on which Brecht had cannily considered his safety or comfort rather than the demands of heroic idealism. Yet here he represents Galileo as virtually a villain for doing what he himself had not only previously advocated but had also, in effect, actually done. An earlier version of the play had invited the audience to a quite considerable activity of judgment by requiring it to deal with a man whose cunning in evasion deserves admiration even though his cowardice deserves contempt. But in the published version, Galileo's refusal to be heroically intransigent can wake only a saddening scorn.⁴

One is inevitably drawn to the speculation that Brecht, in changing his view of Galileo, was changing his view of his own course of conduct, that the Galileo who hates and condemns himself for his abjuration represents the author's own judgment on himself. But the personal interpretation, although it recommends itself, can have but a minor part in our understanding of the moral doctrine of the play. Nor, perhaps, is it finally to our purpose that Brecht himself has explained the revision of his judgment of Galileo by his response to the explosion of the atomic bomb, which induced him to take a more rigorous view of the responsibility of the scientist and of the intellectual in general. An author's testimony on why he wrote as he did must always be treated with respect, but it is not always as authoritative as it seems. If we ask why, in the second version of his *Galileo*, Brecht revised not only his earlier judgment on his protagonist but also the moral attitude of a lifetime, perhaps the satisfactory answer is that his protean mind, doctrinal but indifferent to the claims of doctrinal consistency, happened at this moment to be captivated by the idea of an absolute intransigent morality and the heroism it calls for.

⁴ The first version of *Galileo* has not been published. Professor Bentley has read it in manuscript and I take my account of its tendency from his essay.

